

DETECTIVE BURR'S STOLEN MARCH!

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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

July 18, 1894.

No. 821.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXIV

THE TRAMP SHADOWER'S BACKER.



WITH WILD STARING EYES AND FACE HALF CONCEALED IN SHADOW, SHE LOOKED THE IDEAL WHITE DEMON.

THE
Tramp Shadower's Backer;
OR,
Unraveling the Umbrella Clue.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

CHAPTER I.

AN ASTONISHED DETECTIVE.

DETECTIVE BURR had just reached home after finishing up an important case, and found three men waiting for him.

It was early in the forenoon, and, as he had not been to bed the previous night, he was not particularly pleased to see the visitors, for he knew it meant the starting upon another chase.

However, he put a good face upon it and received his visitors as pleasantly as possible.

"This is Detective Burr, I believe?" said one of the men, assuming the role of spokesman.

"The same," replied Thad. "What can I do for you?"

"There is a very mysterious case down our way," began the man. "We live at Newtown, Long Island, and, as I say, there is a very mysterious case there."

"What is it?" asked the detective, a little impatiently.

"That is just the trouble," rejoined the stranger, with a troubled countenance. "I will relate the circumstances, and you can then draw your own inference. In one of the old-time houses in the village there has lived for some few years past an eccentric old woman. She has lived there for over five years, yet nobody has been able to find out much about her. She never made friends or acquaintances among her neighbors, and not half a dozen of them have ever been in her house. Well, to make a long story short, for the past four or five days she has not been seen about, and her house is shut up like a prison. Several of the neighbors have knocked at her door, her milkman and butcher among the rest, but received no answer."

"Perhaps she has gone off somewhere?" suggested Thad, wearily, in no mood to either listen to the story or take hold of the case.

"No, we are satisfied that she has not," averred the man. "We always know when she goes away."

"Or is sick?" he still further ventured.

"That may be it; but, why should she lock herself up in that way? The theory down there is that she has either been murdered or committed suicide."

"Why didn't you call in the local police?"

"We did, but they declined to have anything to do with it, and suggested that we go to Superintendent Byrnes. We went to him, and he sent us to you, sir."

"Byrnes sent you to me, did he?" questioned the detective, now evincing some interest in the matter.

"He did."

"In that case I shall go with you, but I can tell you now that I am too nearly worn out to do you much good. I haven't slept a wink for two days and nights."

However, after taking a bath and eating his breakfast, he was so refreshed that he forgot his fatigue, and the nature of the case upon which he was about to engage promised that fascination which the true detective never fails to feel.

Accordingly, some time before noon, the special announced his readiness to accompany his callers, and they left the house together.

Taking a cross-town car to the Thirty-fourth Street Ferry, they were soon transferred to the Long Island side of the river, where they boarded a Long Island Railroad train, and in fifteen minutes were set down at the quaint old village of Newtown.

A walk of a quarter of a mile from the depot brought them to the house of the woman recluse.

The house was a one-story structure of stone, and nestled in a perfect thicket of trees and shrubbery, so much so that the house could scarcely be seen from the road.

A stone wall inclosed the grounds on three sides, but a tangled and badly-kept hedge bordered the front and shut out the view from the highway.

As Thad and his companions approached the front gate, the detective saw that some one was at the house, and that the road near the gate was thronged with curious people, who were vainly trying to get a peep at what was going on inside.

He learned a moment later that the place was in the possession of the local authorities, for a constable stopped him at the gate.

Thad's companions introduced him to the officer, and stated what his business was, and he was allowed to pass.

When he reached the house he discovered that the town marshal, named Gibson, was there and on the point of forcing the door.

When Thad saw what was going on he held back and watched the proceedings.

The door was soon broken open and the marshal and another man entered the dwelling.

Burr was allowed to accompany them, but took no part in the investigations just then.

He was busy with his eyes and ears, however, and it did not take him long to take an inventory of the marshal and his companion, who, he was advised, was a local detective.

This detective, whose name was Crosby, was a large, red-faced man, evidently a high-liver, and wonderfully self-conceited.

He glanced contemptuously at Thad when told that he, too, was a detective, as much as to say that he wondered why they wanted to bring that would-be investigator out there when they had such a genius as he (Crosby.)

Crosby had not been in the house five minutes before he had discovered everything, according to his own idea, and formulated a theory.

The marshal, on the other hand, was a middle-aged man, of good common sense, and was evidently not very deeply impressed with Crosby's pretended penetration.

Everything in the cottage, which had been handsomely furnished, was in a state of the greatest confusion.

Chairs and tables were upset, drawers pulled out and their contents scattered about over the floor, trunks and chests broken open, and even pillows and mattresses ripped open.

"Aha!" exclaimed the pompous Crosby, when he saw these things, "a case of robbery, pure and simple."

And he stopped long enough to make a note in his memorandum-book.

Passing from the sitting-room to the bedrooms, they found the same state of affairs everywhere.

Finally they reached the kitchen, which also served as the dining-room.

In the center of the floor stood the table, covered with a snowy linen cloth, and a plate, knife and fork set for one, while near the stove, lying on her face, and still clutching the spoon with which she had evidently been stirring some dish in course of preparation, was the dead body of a woman.

"Is this the woman?" inquired the local detective, turning to the marshal.

Before replying, Gibson stooped and turned the body on its back.

"The villains!" he muttered, half to himself. "Why couldn't they be satisfied with robbing the poor creature, without murdering her?"

"Is it the woman?" repeated Crosby impatiently, preparing to write in his book. "Is it the body of the eccentric woman the people about here knew as Mrs. James?"

The marshal had evidently known her by sight, for he answered:

"Yes, this is she."

"You are sure?" demanded the detective imperiously.

"Oh, yes, there is no doubt of it," replied Gibson. "I have seen the woman very often in life, and there is no chance of this being any one else."

The pompous detective stooped and examined the corpse carefully for several minutes, and at length remarked:

"How the deuce could she have come by her death? I see no marks of violence."

"Did you see nothing before I turned her over?" inquired the marshal, unable to suppress a smile.

Crosby hastened to turn the body back in its original position, and then he saw, what

the marshal had seen at the first, two small rents in the back of the clothing, from which a small amount of blood had oozed and run out upon the white garment.

The woman had on a heavy woolen skirt but no waist, the upper portion of her body being covered only with her underclothing and a shawl, which had fallen off during the struggle which probably ensued directly after the stabbing.

"Well," concluded the local, at last, "there is no doubt that the woman has been murdered, and that, too, for the purpose of robbery. The next thing is to find the guilty party."

"Yes, that is the important thing now," said the marshal.

"And in order to do that it will be necessary to learn something about the antecedents of the woman herself."

"For that purpose we had better call in some of the neighbors," suggested Gibson.

Half a dozen persons were called in, among them the tradespeople with whom the deceased had had dealings.

After a good deal of questioning and cross-questioning, which resulted in innumerable contradictions, a tolerably clear account of the strange creature who had occupied the cottage was obtained, which was, in substance, as follows:

The woman had come to Newtown about five and a half years before, bought the property where she lived and immediately moved in.

She had made no friends among the villagers, never visiting any of them or inviting any of them to visit her.

She appeared to have plenty of money, but from whence she derived her income no one had discovered.

No one knew where she had come from or whether she had any friends.

She mentioned the fact of her having been married, and that her husband was a sea-captain, but whether he was dead or she was simply divorced from him, remained a mystery. She was never known to speak of the matter in any form.

She was not a miser, for she spent her money freely for necessities and even luxuries, and had been known to give a good deal in charity.

It was also in evidence, that, although she was quiet in her habits, never troubling anybody else, she was very fond of drink, and spent a good deal of money for wine and brandy.

She was about fifty-five years old when she died, well preserved, and had the appearance of having once been very good-looking.

She rarely had visitors, but once in a great while an elegant equipage, with trim coachman and footmen in livery, was seen to drive up to her gate, and two men alight and enter the house.

One of these was a young man, tall and handsome, and the other an elderly man, very erect, very gray and extremely florid of sunburn.

Both men were well-dressed and had the appearance of being well to do.

The elderly man looked as if he might be a West Pointer, or a member of the regular army, although he always dressed in citizen's clothing when seen in the village.

The woman had not been seen by any one since Wednesday, and this was Saturday, but the appearance of the body did not indicate that she had been dead more than twenty-four hours.

But the questioning failed to bring out the fact that the two mysterious men, or anybody else, for that matter, had been seen about the place for more than a week past.

"My theory is that the woman was murdered some time Friday afternoon or evening," declared Crosby.

"Why so?" inquired the marshal.

"The appearance of the body does not indicate that she has been dead any longer," was replied.

"Then it must have been before the rain," suggested Gibson. "If you remember, there was a heavy rain between six and seven o'clock, and if the party had come after that time there would be muddy footprints on the floor."

"You are right," rejoined the detective, and at once set about searching for muddy footprints.

But at the end of half an hour he was compelled to admit that he could not find any and adopted the theory that the party had visited the cottage before seven o'clock.

"The next thing is to find some clue to these strangers," observed Crosby. "In my opinion either this old man or this young man, or both of them together, did the deed. We must find some clue to them."

"How is that to be accomplished?" questioned the marshal.

"Through the dead woman's papers. These men were doubtless old friends—possibly lovers—and she must have some letters from them which will reveal their names, and probably their addresses. When we have discovered these our work will be simple enough."

And he set about looking for papers.

But after spending two hours in this way he was compelled to give it up as a bad job; not a paper or scrap of writing of any kind could be found about the house anywhere.

"This beats all!" declared Crosby. "It is impossible that a woman of her character should not have had papers of some kind."

"She doubtless had," suggested the marshal, "but, you must remember that she has been robbed. It is barely possible that the sole object of the robbery was to gain possession of certain papers, and for fear of missing anything of importance, he has taken every scrap he could find."

The detective looked a little nonplused, but soon recovered enough to ask:

"What makes you think that the possession of the papers was the sole object of the outrage?"

"The fact that I see a good many valuable articles about, among them this purse which I found on the mantel in the parlor. There appears to be a good deal of money in it."

"How much?" inquired the other; and taking the pocketbook and opening it, he drew out a large roll of bills, which he counted over.

"Why, there is over two thousand dollars here!" he ejaculated at last.

"That does not look as though the deed had been committed for the purpose of robbery, does it?" smiled the marshal, sarcastically.

"Oh, I don't know about that," growled the detective petulantly. "It is no uncommon thing for a burglar to forget the booty after committing a murder to obtain it."

However, at the end of another hour the local was compelled to confess that he was completely stumped for a clue.

"If a clue is ever found it will be by the merest accident," Crosby declared. "There is nothing here. The fellow was evidently a keen customer."

"In that case I shall be compelled to allow this other man to try his hand," announced the marshal, winking significantly at Thad.

"What can he do more than I have done?" demanded the now irate Crosby.

"I don't know. But, we shall see," rejoined the marshal. "Mr. Burr, we confess ourselves whipped. Please try your hand."

CHAPTER II.

A REAL DETECTIVE'S WORK.

CROSBY was furious when he saw that in spite of his protests the city detective was to go over the work and attempt to find a clue where he had failed, but Thad paid no attention to his sneers, and bowing politely to the marshal, said:

"Thank you, Mr. Gibson. It can hardly be supposed that I will be able to make any discovery after such a brilliant man as you have had at work has failed. However, as you request it, I shall do my best."

"Huh! It is just as well for him to hedge in advance, for if he fails, as he is sure to do, he won't have to come down quite so much," Crosby said confidentially to Gibson, but intentionally loud enough for Thad to hear.

"We may as well tell you what discoveries we have already made, Mr. Burr," ventured the marshal, "so that you will have that to go by."

"No, I thank you!" objected the detective abruptly. "I have seen and heard enough to know all you have learned, and

would rather begin without any further information."

"Smart chap!" sneered Crosby. "Mark my word, he will discover nothing that we have not already found, only he will try to twist it round so as to make it appear that he made the discovery himself."

This had also been intended for Thad's ears, but he did not hear it, having already walked away, leaving the two men standing, astonished at his strange conduct.

They did not even know which way he had gone; but, a moment later, he reappeared, coming out of the kitchen.

He had not remained in this room more than a minute, and then bolted out so precipitately that the two men imagined he must have encountered a ghost.

And then, before they had time to ask a question, he bolted out of the front door and again disappeared.

"What's the idiot up to, I wonder?" queried Crosby.

"That remains to be seen," answered Gibson.

"What does he expect to find in the yard?" still questioned the disgusted detective.

"That is also a mystery. We shall have to wait."

Thad had only been gone a few minutes when he reappeared, and, without so much as bestowing a glance upon his two critics, again entered the kitchen.

Curiosity impelled them to peep in upon him, when they were surprised to see him on his hands and knees under the table.

"The fellow's crazy!" muttered Crosby.

"Perhaps not so much so as we imagine," hinted the marshal, who had begun to take a deep interest in Burr's maneuvers.

This made the would be detective wild with jealous rage, but it had the desirable effect of also rendering him silent.

Meanwhile Thad was busily engaged in searching for a clue.

After remaining under the table for a minute or two, he came out, and was next observed to mount a chair and begin looking for something on the top shelf of a cupboard.

Presently he took down a jar of white stuff which had the appearance of flour.

Taking a tin pie-pan, he poured out a sufficient quantity of the white powder to fill the tin, and then went to the hydrant and moistened the stuff until it was the consistency of dough, mixing it with a spoon, and finally making it into a flat cake.

When this was done he crawled under the table again and spread the cake on the floor.

An instant later he emerged from under the table and laid the cake in a basket which he had found in the room and placed on the table.

No sooner was this done than he made up another cake in the same manner that he had made the first one, placed it in the basket and again went out of doors.

All this time he was being watched with the greatest interest by the marshal, and the greatest contempt by the detective.

They watched him go out of the front gate and walk down the road for some distance, where he stopped and stooped down for a moment or two.

He was then seen to rise, walk a few steps and squat again.

This was repeated several times, and at length he started to return to the house, and the two men hurried inside so as not to appear to have been watching him.

When Thad reached the house he walked directly into the kitchen and put the basket upon the table.

From the expression of satisfaction on his face the marshal guessed that Thad had made some discovery, and hastened to ask:

"Well, what success?"

"Great!" was the prompt response. "I have almost solved the riddle. But, before I unfold my discoveries to you, I would like to have you send for a physician and let him make a post-mortem examination of the body."

"Very well, replied the marshal. "I will send for Doctor Barker."

"Send for two of them while you are about it," suggested Thad.

"All right, Doctor Barker and Doctor White. They are the best physicians we have in the village."

A couple of the villagers were called and sent for the two doctors, who soon put in an appearance.

They were accompanied by the coroner, and the three men removed the body to another room for examination.

While they were at work in one room Thad proceeded to explain to the marshal and Crosby what he had discovered.

He first took from the basket the two cakes, which turned out to be plaster Paris, a large lump of clay and several large sheets of paper with rude diagrams penciled on them.

"In the first place," he began, "I want to tell you that robbery had nothing to do with the crime we are trying to unravel."

"Indeed!" contemptuously from Crosby.

"I shall prove what I say," continued Burr. "I shall show you all in good time what the real motive was, but not now. In the second place, the assassin arrived here before half past six—"

"A thing we could have told you an hour ago," interrupted Crosby.

Burr, unaffected by the insult, continued:

"Like yourselves, gentlemen, I have been unable to find any trace of muddy footsteps, but under the table I find dust. We are thus assured of the hour."

"I fail to see how you make that out," growled the local detective. "It may prove that he arrived before half past six, but it does not prove how much before."

"Oh, I have other proof of that," smiled Thad.

"What?" demanded the marshal.

"This," picking up a small kitchen clock, which he had turned face-downward on the table.

As he raised it to their view, the men saw two things, namely, that the glass covering the face was broken, and the other that the hands indicated a quarter past six.

Then pointing to a lot of glass on the floor, the great detective pursued:

"The clock lay there on the floor when I found it. It had evidently stood on the mantel over the stove—in fact, we are assured of the fact by the outline of the clock on the wall where it had shielded that portion of the wall from the smoke which had blackened the rest of it. As I said, the clock stood on the mantel, and was evidently knocked off during the tussle which followed the stabbing. The shock stopped the clock at the very minute at which the tussle took place—a quarter past six."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" gasped the marshal. "You are a magician, Mr. Burr!"

"No, only a detective," rejoined Thad, modestly. "Any detective with an ounce of brains could discover a little thing like that."

Crosby was crushed, but furious.

"Now," pursued the detective, "the old lady did not expect her visitor. She had commenced undressing when he knocked."

"How do you make this out?" interrupted Crosby, ill-naturedly.

"Easily enough," replied Thad. "Listen. The woman had on only the skirt of a dress, while the waist lies there beside that chair where she threw it. If she had just taken it out of the wardrobe to put it on it would have been still folded, but as you see, there is not a crease in it, and still retains the mold of her figure. You also noticed that she wore a shawl, which proves that she did not take time to put on her waist, but, throwing the shawl over her shoulders, hastened to open the door."

"By Jove!" ejaculated Gibson.

Crosby bit his lip in silent rage.

"The woman," continued Thad, "knew the person who knocked. Her haste to open the door gives rise to the conjecture; what follows proves it. The assassin gained admission without difficulty. He was a young man, rather tall and elegantly dressed. He wore a high hat and lavender kid gloves. He also carried an umbrella and smoked a cigar in a holder."

Crosby roared with laughter.

"This is the most ridiculous piece of presumption that I ever heard!" he declared. "I have read such things in romances and seen something like it in plays, but for a man to coolly stand up and make the assertion that he has actually discovered such things through the medium of no more tangi-

ble clues than are to be found here, why it is simply laughable."

"Perhaps so, to minds like yours," retorted Burr, coolly. "But, listen to the evidence before you are so quick to condemn. Because you are a novice in this sort of thing is no reason that I am. Listen and learn. Kindly take a look at these cakes of plaster. They represent the track of the boots worn by the assassin. If you will notice, you will see that it was a narrow boot, high in the instep and of the most fashionable make. This I found under the table. If this does not satisfy you, look at this lump of clay which I dug up out of the ditch where I found the key to the front door. Just see whether the two tracks were not made by the same foot. The last one was made after the rain and the ground had become soft, which shows that, after completing his work, he left the house, which was somewhere after seven o'clock. I found the same track at several other points along the ditch, showing that the assassin avoided the sidewalk for fear of meeting some one. The same footprints I find in the garden where no one else has been since, showing that he entered from the back way. As he came through the garden the assassin made a jump in one place to get over a flower-bed. No one but a young man could have accomplished the jump."

Thad paused to see the effect his words were having on his hearers, and found them both with eyes and mouths wide open with astonishment.

He continued:

"Near the spot where I found the jump there was a hole in the soft earth where the fellow's umbrella was thrust in."

"How do you know it wasn't a cane?" interposed Crosby.

"Because the impression of the small disk of leather which is always to be found at the top of umbrellas was distinctly visible."

"Wonderful!" gasped old Gibson.

"You probably also wonder how I know he wore a high hat?" pursued the detective.

"I should like to know that."

"The explanation is very simple. Just take the trouble to examine the circle traced in the dust on the marble top of that table. Nothing but the crown of a silk hat could have left that peculiar circle. Now look at these finger-marks on the upper shelf of this wardrobe. They were made, if you notice, by fingers incased in kid gloves, and the person making them stood on the floor, otherwise there would have been a chair near by, and the person who could stand on the floor and reach that shelf must be above the medium height. Besides, if he had got upon a chair he would have been able to see and would not have been compelled to feel for what he was after, as the multiplicity of finger-marks shows that he did do."

"But you stated that the fellow smoked a cigar?" interrogated Crosby. "How do you prove that?"

"Nothing easier," smiled the detective.

"We shall be glad to hear it," sneeringly.

"And you shall be gratified," retorted Thad sharply. "Look at this!" he went on, unfolding a bit of paper in which was folded a tip of a cigar. "You will observe this has been recently smoked, as the ashes are still fresh and crisp. Moreover, as I found it near the stove here, it must have been recently dropped there, as the floor is generally swept every day. This establishes the fact that the man who was here smoked a cigar."

"But it does not prove that he smoked it in a holder," objected Crosby.

"No, but look! The tip has never been moistened or chewed as it must have been had it been taken in the mouth. Therefore, it must have been smoked in a holder."

It was now Gibson's turn to laugh, and that at the expense of the would-be detective.

"You may as well give it up, Crosby," he laughed. "You will never down this man, any more than you were able to find the clues that he has discovered."

"Don't be too sure of that," snorted Crosby, growing very red in the face. "I'm not half through yet."

"Proceed, then!" smiled Thad, good-naturedly. "I have no time to waste in dallying. If you have anything more to ask, out with it. I am ready for you."

"You stated a while ago that the fellow had on kid gloves," resumed Crosby.

"And proved it," interrupted Thad.

"But not the color. You asserted that the kids were lavender. How are you going to prove that?"

And the fellow laughed triumphantly.

"Easily. Under the nails of the woman I found small particles of kid. These she must have scraped off the gloves when she turned and grasped his hands after he had stabbed her."

"Aha!" shouted Gibson. "Are you satisfied now?"

"Not till I see the proof," growled the other.

"Here you are, then!" and Thad, unfolding another bit of paper containing a few small particles of something, took a microscope from his pocket, and holding it over the particles, said:

"Examine those under the glass."

The fellow was floored. Under the microscope the particles were clearly seen to be pieces of kid of a lavender tint.

"Now," pursued the detective, "that part of it is settled. Let us proceed. So far we have only traced the young man into the house and seen what he was like. The next thing we find is that he told the old lady that he had not dined. We know this from the fact that she was engaged in cooking, and that she had set but one place at the table."

"How do you know that it was not for herself?" asked Crosby.

"Because I find the fragments of a fish supper in the cupboard, which was her own meal. The day was Friday, you remember, and the woman, we shall find, was a Catholic, but she was cooking ham and eggs for her guest!"

CHAPTER III.

INCREDIBLE FORESIGHT.

PIQUED with envy, and furious at the contemptible position into which the great detective had thrown him, Crosby was on the point of bursting out in another peal of derisive laughter, that being his only logic, when he was checked by the sudden appearance of the doctors who had been holding the autopsy on the body.

"We find that the woman came to her death by two intricate stabs in the back," observed Dr. Barker.

"No indications of poison, I presume?" ventured Thad.

"None," was the reply.

"What had the woman dined off of?"

"Fish!" was the startling response.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Gibson. "This is simply remarkable. I never saw anything like it. Your foresight, sir, is simply incredible. I should never have believed it possible, if I had not heard it with my own ears. But, please go on, Mr. Burr."

The doctors having finished their report, Burr resumed:

"The next point we come to is, that the young man was no ordinary person, at least in the woman's eyes. You see she has put her best china plate before him and the only silver knife and fork I find about the place. If you will notice, also, she put on a clean tablecloth, and that of the finest linen. We know that she put on this cloth especially for him because there is another clean tablecloth in the cupboard which has been used perhaps once or twice, but that was not fine enough or clean enough for her guest, so she must get out her best linen for him."

"Remarkable!" murmured old Gibson.

"Now then," proceeded Thad, "we have got the young man seated. He begins by drinking a glass of wine. You will notice that this bottle has had but one glass taken out. Meanwhile the woman was cooking his ham and eggs, which we find on the stove. His courage was not strengthened sufficiently by the wine, so he follows it with four or five glasses of brandy. You note the brandy bottle has at least four if not five glasses gone. This appears to have given him the requisite amount of courage, and he arose from the table, and, while the poor woman was leaning over the stove, he stabbed her twice in the back. But, she was not killed instantly. Half raising herself, she turned and clutched the assassin's hands. A short struggle ensued, when he finally succeeded

in releasing himself from her grasp and hurled her away from him, and she fell, face-downward, as we found her.

Gibson could only shake his head and groan. He was unable to find words to express his astonishment, while Crosby arched his brows, pursed his lips and scratched his head in dismay.

"The next point for examination is the motive," continued the detective. "Why did this well-dressed young man murder this woman? What did he want? Money? No. We have already seen that he did not want that. He had some other motive. What he wanted, what he sought and what he found, were papers, letters, documents, which he knew to be in the possession of the victim. That he found them is proven by the fact that not a scrap of writing was to be found when you gentlemen searched the premises. He found them. But when he found them, what did he do with them? Carry them away with him? Not at all. Why, he burned them, of course, not in the kitchen stove here, but in the little parlor stove. If you doubt my word, examine the heap of ashes in the little stove. The stove had not been used for a long time—not since cold weather, and was consequently clean, so that the ashes of the burned papers are distinctly to be seen and recognized as nothing else. The outlines of envelopes and folded documents are still plainly visible. This completes his work, and he leaves the house, locking the door on the outside and throwing the key in the ditch, where I found it."

"Your examination, Mr. Burr," said Gibson, grasping the detective warmly by the hand, "is the completest thing I ever saw, and I believe you are on the right track. It will be an easy matter, it seems to me, after this, to locate the guilty party."

Crosby was completely crushed; he hadn't another word to say.

"Yes, the only thing is to locate the criminal, which, as you say, will not be difficult, after what we have already discovered, and I shall spare no pains to locate him. In the mean time, you can greatly assist me by keeping a sharp look-out for suspicious characters about here. You would undoubtedly recognize this man by the description I have been able to gather?"

"Most assuredly, and I shall lose no opportunity to track him, if he shows up in this vicinity."

There being nothing more to be done at the village, for the detective, at least, he took the train back to the city.

It was nearly seven o'clock in the evening when he reached home, and he found his wife and family absent.

Not knowing when he would return, they had accepted an invitation to a theater party.

However, the servant got him his dinner, and when he had disposed of that, the detective retired to his private office to collect the details of the case upon which he was at work and formulate a plan of operation.

He had not been engaged in this manner long before he was disturbed by a ring at the door-bell, and, a moment later, by a knock at his office door.

On opening the door he was met by the servant girl.

"Please, sir, Mr. Jerome is in the parlor and would like to see you," she announced timidly, for she knew her master did not like to be disturbed when he was engaged in any intricate case.

"Very well, Betty," replied Thad good-naturedly. "Let him come up. But if anybody else calls, I am not at home."

Donald Jerome was a young man of about thirty, and one of the warmest friends Thad possessed.

He lived but a few doors from the detective, with his mother, who was a widow, and mother and son appeared to live only for each other.

It was largely through this devotion that Burr had become so attached, both to the young man and his mother.

Scarcely a day passed when the detective was at home that he was not at their home or they at his. From a boy the young man had confided his profoundest secrets to Burr, and the latter had come to look upon him almost as a son.

He had studied law and been admitted to the bar but a year or so before, but, through Thad's influence and large acquaintance, the

young man had already acquired a lucrative practice.

He was the sole support of his mother.

A few moments after the maid retired the young man tapped at the office door and, at the detective's invitation, entered.

Thad saw at a glance that young Jerome was troubled about something, and, as he had heard that his mother had been ill for a day or two, attributed it to that.

"Sit down, my boy," invited the detective, wringing his hand heartily. "How is your mother? I hope she is no worse."

"No, Mrs. Jerome is no worse," he answered, sinking wearily into a chair and speaking in an indifferent manner.

Thad looked at him in surprise.

During all his acquaintance with Donald he had never heard him speak of his mother except in the most tender manner.

What could have come over him?

Burr could not help thinking he had been mistaken in what he imagined he had heard.

"You say your mother is no worse?" he repeated. "By that I infer that she is better."

"Yes, I think she is," rejoined the young man carelessly. "In fact, Mrs. Jerome has never been seriously ill, so far as I know."

Now Thad was dumfounded.

He stared at Donald for a minute or two unable to speak.

"Why, what on earth is the matter, my boy?" he finally faltered. "Why do you speak of your mother so formally as Mrs. Jerome? You haven't had a tiff, have you?"

Donald was about to answer, but Thad, thinking that he had been too precipitate in his question, interrupted the other by saying:

"But first, tell me what is the nature of your mother's illness, and above all, what caused the relapse which my servant tells me she suffered this afternoon?"

"I hardly know what has been the matter with the lady," rejoined the young man, in the same disinterested tone. "Her relapse, if you choose to call it by that name, was caused by a bit of melancholy news which she read in the afternoon paper."

"Melancholy news?" gasped the kind-hearted detective. "Why, what on earth—I hope nothing connected with her own or your—"

"No," interrupted Donald, wearily. "It was not connected with her family, exactly. It was the news of a murder."

"A murder?"

"Yes. A woman out at Newtown, by the name of Mrs. James, whom Mrs. Jerome took a great deal of interest in, has been murdered."

Thad was thunderstruck.

Was it possible—but no! That could not be! His old friend, Mrs. Jerome, could never have been mixed up in a thing of that kind!

But the mention of the murdered woman's name in connection with his old friend at this particular juncture called up fears and anticipations which rendered the situation extremely awkward, to say the least.

He hardly knew how to proceed.

However, after a struggle he determined to find out more about the case, and began by asking:

"What was the cause of the falling out between you and your mother, my boy? You will not hesitate to confide in me? You never have. Why should you do so now?"

Donald bent his head and was silent a long time.

At length he raised his eyes to the face of his old friend and said:

"Yes, I will confide in you. I had rather tell you than carry the burden alone. I must tell some one, and I know of no one who is more worthy of my confidence than you."

"I hope so, my young friend," sighed Thad, as the other paused.

"I know it," he responded, and again became silent.

Finally he resumed:

"First of all, I want to tell you that Mrs. Jerome is not my mother!"

Thad sprang from his seat.

"Not your mother? Are you mad, young man?" he exclaimed.

"Not quite, but I shall soon be, I fear."

"What is this you are telling me?"

"Nothing but the truth. She is not my mother."

"How did you discover this?"

"Sit down, sir, and I will tell you."

Thad sunk into his seat again and the young man proceeded:

"In looking through this woman's secretary the other day, I ran across some letters. They had been written many years, and out of curiosity I began to read one of them. It was doubtless wrong for me to have done it, but I did it, and that is all there is about it. I had not read very far, before I came across something that astonished me."

"What was it?" asked the detective, eagerly.

"I found a proposition from some man, whom I inferred at once to be my father, which deeply concerned my own welfare. From reading the first letter I continued until I had devoured them all—something like two dozen—and this is what I gleaned: It seems that this woman was married to my father when they were both young. That she was poor and nameless, while he was rich and belonged to one of the proudest old families in New York. The marriage was kept a profound secret for two years, and in the meantime a son was born to them. Then by some means it was discovered by my father's family that he had married this girl, and, as they desired that he should marry a lady of their own class, they at once set about procuring a separation. They sought out this woman, and, by bribing her heavily, induced her to agree to grant my father a divorce on some pretext or other."

"It appears that my father must have loved her madly, for he was almost driven insane at the separation, notwithstanding this woman had been willing to sell herself for gold, which showed her to be as base and heartless as the meanest wretch in the town."

"However, she took the money and was divorced, and in a short time afterward my father was married to the daughter of a wealthy and aristocratic gentleman, and in due course of time I was born. It appears, though, that my father still loved the son of his first wife, whether he loved her or not, and hated my mother and me with all the ardor of his impetuous nature, for I find in the first of the series of letters a proposition to this woman to contrive some means of exchanging me for the other child, so that my father could have him near him and bring him up with all the luxuries and benefits of a rich man, while I was to be placed with a certain woman, who was to take me abroad and bring me up with the impression that I was the son of this woman."

"Was the scheme carried out?" interjected Thad, eagerly.

"It was."

"And the other boy has been usurping your place all these years, eh?"

"Yes, that is now evident."

"Is he still living?"

"That I do not know, but I shall find out."

"Who was this nurse?"

"Mrs. James, the woman who has just been murdered."

"Have you seen her lately?"

"Yes, a week ago. As soon as I learned these things, I went to her, confronted her with the facts, and she confessed all. She loved me as though I had been her own son, and was as deeply grieved at my wrongs as I was myself. I had hoped through her to establish my identity and regain my rights; but, now, she is gone, and there is but one hope left me."

"What is that, my boy?"

"The old lady had certain papers which, if I can obtain possession of, will come very near winning my case, I believe."

Thad knew only too well that the young man's hopes in this direction were futile, for the papers he had alluded to were undoubtedly the same that Mrs. James's assassin had burned in the little parlor stove.

But he deemed it the part of wisdom not to undeceive the young man at that time.

After a few moments' reflection, he asked:

"Have you spoken to your mother—I mean Mrs. Jerome—about these discoveries?"

"Yes, sir; I confronted her with the affair as soon as Mrs. James had confirmed the evidence I already possessed."

"What did she say?"

"She said—oh, I cannot tell you what she said. She tried to justify herself, made out a plausible story and told, I do not know how many thousands of lies."

"This was the cause, then, of her late illness, was it not?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Do you imagine she had anything to do with the death of Mrs. James?"

"No, I'll give her the credit of not believing her capable of that crime, even if it had been policy for her to do it. It would have been better for her if the old woman had lived."

CHAPTER IV.

STARTLING DISCLOSURES.

Burr went over the situation in his mind, and the whole thing seemed plain to him now.

He recalled the well-dressed young man and the old gentleman who were described by the neighbors of the dead woman as having come in a handsome equipage.

Who could this be but Donald's father and half-brother?

Again, who could the elegant young man who had called upon Mrs. James the evening of the murder be but young Jerome?

It must have been he, and as he, more than any other living mortal, had a motive for destroying any papers which would prove his false position (supposing him to have known the secret of his birth,) who else could the detective attribute the assassination to?

The case looked so clear that he was about to declare aloud his opinion, but upon mature reflection, remembering that Donald knew nothing of his investigations, he decided to say nothing in that direction, and proceeded to question the young man in order to discover how much he knew in the matter.

"Have you ever seen your father?" he began.

"Yes, I believe I have," replied Donald. "I did not know it at the time, but I recall a tall, handsome man, who used to call upon Mrs. Jerome once in a while when I was a little boy, and they appeared to be excellent friends."

"Who did you understand him to be?"

"I understood he was an uncle. I forget now just whether she told me he was my uncle, or whether the idea grew out of a childish fancy, but I know I regarded him as a relative."

"What was his treatment of you?"

"Cold and stern generally, but he sometimes brought me small presents."

"This would be consistent with the man as you describe him, but you say that this woman, Mrs. James, was your nurse and had been employed to bring you up. How long did she keep you?"

"Until I was about twelve years old."

"And then you went to live with Mrs. Jerome?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had you seen her often before that?"

"Oh, yes, she frequently visited me."

"While abroad? You said the scheme was to take you abroad."

"Yes, I was kept in Paris and Germany until I was twelve years old, and this woman was also over there and frequently visited me."

"What was her treatment of you?"

"That of an affectionate mother, always."

"Did your father visit you while over there?"

"Yes, sir, his visits were the most frequent while on the other side. When we got back here, he seldom called, and finally stopped coming altogether."

"Did he still continue to maintain you and your supposed mother all this time?"

"No, I think not. So far as I can learn, he ceased to support us almost as soon as we returned to America; but as he had provided very liberally before, my foster-mother had managed to save enough to get along with until I was old enough to earn money."

"Since which you have maintained her and yourself, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

At that moment there was a rap at the door, and the servant announced that Mrs. Jerome wished to see Donald.

The young man hesitated.

"Go, my boy," urged the detective.

"See what she wants. She may be worse, and although you have much to blame her for, you can still afford to be merciful."

The young man made no reply, arose and left the room.

"Poor fellow," sighed the kind-hearted detective, when he was gone. "This has been a cruel blow to him. There never was a nobler, braver young fellow, and there was never a happier one until this revelation broke his great heart. I wonder where it will end. However," he mused, picking up one of the letters which the young man had dropped, "it is all the better for my case. With these letters and the information I have already gleaned there will be comparatively smooth sailing from this out."

The detective again began his work of summing up the details he had so far accumulated, but had got but a little way when another knock at the door, caused him to pause.

It was Donald, and he staggered into the room more like a man of eighty than one of thirty, and sunk wearily into a chair.

He did not utter a word, but his face showed indications of deep anguish.

"Well?" inquired Burr anxiously, "how is she now?"

"Worse," answered Donald with a careless shrug. "She has become delirious, and no longer knows what she is saying. She has been abusing me in the most horrible manner, calling me all the vile names you can imagine! I really believe she is going mad."

"This is terrible," murmured Thad. "Haven't you better send for a doctor?"

"I have just done so."

The young man sat near the detective's table, and began gathering up the letters he had left there, in an abstracted way; but he did not notice that one was missing—one which Thad had abstracted and put into his pocket for future reference.

The detective was anxious to resume the interrupted conversation, and began by asking:

"What caused her to commence her abuse of you, my boy? Did you repeat your request for an explanation of her conduct?"

"No, I said nothing. I entered the room in compliance with her request, and found her with her face to the wall, and I thought she was asleep, but presently she turned her head toward me, and as soon as her eyes fell upon me she began her abuse. How long she would have kept it up if I had not left, is hard to say. But I did not remain to hear any more and left the room."

Burr was silent some time, and then asked:

"What do you propose to do now?"

"I shall see my father, and tell him that I know the facts, and demand my rights."

"That you should do, my boy, and I will do all in my power to aid you. But let me ask you something."

"What is that?"

"Are you acquainted with any of the circumstances of the murder of Mrs. James?"

"Very few. I only know that she was murdered in a most mysterious and cowardly manner."

"Have you any theory as to who the guilty party is?"

"Not the slightest."

"Then, I will tell you what I think. I know something of the matter, and my opinion is that either your father or half-brother is the guilty party."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do."

"What leads you to believe so?"

"I have several reasons. In the first place, from what you yourself have told me to-night, I infer that they are the only ones who could in any way profit by the old woman's death, and I have other evidence besides."

Donald looked at him curiously for some seconds before answering and finally said:

"Look here, Mr. Burr, you appear to take great interest in this affair. Tell me, are you not working upon the case?"

Thad hesitated. He was not quite clear as to whether he should be too frank with the young man or not. But he finally concluded that he could trust him with this secret, as he had with many others during their acquaintance, and answered:

"This is entirely between ourselves, my

young friend, and I trust you will mention the matter to no one. I am engaged upon the case. As I said, I do not wish you to mention the fact to a living soul, above all, your mother—that is, Mrs. Jerome."

To the detective's utter surprise, instead of promising silence, the young man made no reply whatever, and sat wildly staring at him as if his eyes would burst out of his head.

At length, however, he muttered, almost inaudibly:

"You are working on the case? How strange! What have you discovered?"

Still believing implicitly in his young friend's honesty, Burr related in detail the circumstances of the investigation and the result.

He was still more astonished at Donald's agitation, but, after a little reflection, attributed it to his grief at the loss of his old nurse, coupled with the discovery of the fraud that had been imposed upon him by his supposed mother.

"And you think," he finally muttered in the same faltering voice, "that the young man you describe was my foster-brother?"

"I cannot imagine who else it could have been."

"No," he muttered at length, "it could not have been any one else. It must have been he."

After another pause, Thad asked:

"When do you propose to see your father?"

"To-morrow, early—as early as possible. That is, if he is in the city, and I can find him."

"That will be well. And while you are about it, try and find out something about this half-brother of yours. Learn his name, if possible, and where he may be found."

"I shall do so."

"It may also be possible for you to learn something about the assassination in the course of your conversation with your father, and if you can, it will materially aid in clearing up the mystery, and at the same time assist you in your own case."

"Believe me, my old friend, I shall do all in my power to assist you, as you have promised to do with me."

"I believe you, my dear young friend, and together we shall unearth the villain who committed the horrible deed."

"And now I must bid you good-night," said Donald, rising to go. "I shall see you to-morrow."

"Do, and report whatever you find out in regard to the matter."

Donald left the house, and Thad devoted another hour to the work of collecting his data for the case.

He then laid out his plans for the following day, and when that was done, went to bed.

His first intention was to see the superintendent and lay the case before him and get his advice.

He was all ready to depart upon this mission when there came a knock at his office door, and the next instant Donald again stood before him.

The young man was greatly excited, and hastened to say:

"I have already called to see my father, and find that he is out of the city."

"Out of the city?" repeated Thad, with a perplexed countenance.

"Yes, gone to Europe."

"That looks bad—for him," ejaculated the detective. "When did he go?"

"He has been gone a month."

"Ah, that alters the case. Is the young man here?"

"Yes, he is at home."

"Did you see him?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I thought of doing so, but when I came to think the matter over I concluded that it would not be best."

"Your courage did not fail you, I hope?"

"No, but after thinking the matter over, I decided that you could manage it better than I."

"I?"

"Yes. I have brought the letters, and if you will go and have a talk with him, it will serve to clear the way for me."

Thad pondered the question for some moments, and finally said:

"If you deem it the wiser plan, I shall take pleasure in doing it, but in my opinion, it would have been far better for you to have gone yourself."

Young Jerome made no reply, but proceeded to hand the letters to the detective.

Thad did not like his actions in this matter.

There was a flavor of cowardice about it that went against him, besides the manner in which the young man appeared to want to shift the responsibility upon another annoyed him.

However, his love for the young man, whom he had known so long, overcame all other feelings he had entertained, and he took the letters with the best grace he could, and said:

"Very well; I shall go at once and see what I can learn from the young man, and let you know the result."

"And I hope you will find enough to convince you of his guilt," rejoined Donald.

"If he is guilty I shall go a long ways in that direction. By the way, you haven't given me the number."

"Oh, that is true. Here it is," and Donald handed him a card with the address of his father written on it.

The house was on fifth avenue, not far from Seventy-second, and Thad took a cab and had himself driven there at once.

The servant at the door informed him that young Francis Jerome was in, and he sent up his card.

Thad was shown to the library, where he found the young man seated, reading a book.

He arose to meet the detective, who was astonished at the resemblance between him and Donald.

Burr had given him a fictitious name and represented himself as a lawyer, so the young man, still holding the card, observed:

"I see by your card, Mr. Watkins, that you are an attorney. What can I do for you?"

"There is a little matter I desire to speak to you about," rejoined the detective—"a matter which concerns your own welfare seriously."

Francis Jerome was of a languid temperament, and at the mention of something affecting his own welfare, he lolled back in his chair, elevated his feet and prepared to be bored.

"My welfare?" he drawled. "What is it, pray?"

Thad determined to come to the point at once and rivet his interest, so he replied:

"I find by a series of correspondence which has chanced to fall into my hands that you are not the rightful heir to the property you expect to inherit, nor even to the name you now bear."

The young man pursed his lips and stared at the detective with an amused smile.

"This is very good," he ejaculated, good-naturedly. "Might be startling to some people, but my nerves are strong. What is the scheme, anyway? The regulation old blackmail game, or something entirely new?"

"Before you commence talking about blackmail, my young friend," said Thad coolly, handing him the first of the series of letters, "suppose you glance over that."

As soon as the young man saw the handwriting he became interested and proceeded to read the letter.

CHAPTER V.

STILL IN DOUBT.

FRANCIS JEROME read the letter through without any visible emotion, handed it back to the detective, and coolly asked:

"Are there any more?"

"Something like a hundred," rejoined Thad. "But I shan't ask you to read them all. I have picked out and marked a few which, I think, will suffice to enlighten you on the point I wish you to understand."

"Thanks!" drawled the young man. "It's awfully kind of you, I'm sure, to have gone to the trouble. I feared you were going to impose the task of reading the whole deuced batch upon me, in which case I should certainly have declined."

Burr handed him the next letter in the series which he desired him to read, and the young man threw himself back in an easy position and proceeded to peruse it.

The detective watched his face closely, but if the young man experienced any emotion whatever he did not manifest it by any outward sign.

In fact, aside from an occasional arching of the brows the matter appeared to have no more effect upon him than the driest essay which did not concern him in the least.

When he had finished the second letter, he handed it back and asked for the next.

This he perused in the same indifferent manner, and so on until the whole series had been gone over by him.

"Is that all?" he questioned languidly, when he noticed that the detective did not hand him another letter.

"Yes," replied Thad, somewhat taken aback at the other's coolness, "that completes the series. What do you think of it?"

The fellow shrugged slightly and arched his brows.

"It appears to prove your assertion," he drawled, "that I have no claim to the name and position I have held all my life. Who and where is the rightful heir?"

"He goes by the name of Donald Jerome at present, and he is here in the city."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"A splendid young man."

"Educated and refined?"

"Very much so. He is a lawyer of some prominence, although only about your own age."

"A year older," corrected the young man.

"Certainly, about a year older."

"That is fortunate," drawled the young man, "both for himself and the family. It so often happens that these lost heirs turn out to be low-bred sort of fellows when found. At least, that is how they appear to run in romances, and that is the only place I have ever encountered them. Judging from this standard, these lost heirs have an unpleasant habit of wandering into bad company and making the acquaintance of all sorts of low people. But you say this young man is really a credit to himself?"

"Yes, and will be a credit to the family and position to which he rightfully belongs," answered Thad with some asperity.

"This is comforting. I have tried my very best to fill the place with credit for about thirty years, and it would grieve me to think that my predecessor was a cad and a source of mortification to the family. And his mother—or rather, my mother; what sort of a person is she? Not a fish-wife or a washer-woman, I hope?"

"No; your mother, although not rich, is as much of a lady as you will find in your own set."

"That is also a comfort. So that I won't lose so very much after all. I will lose my fortune and position in society, but I will be in a mother, and—by Jove! come to think of it, a brother! That will be a great comfort. However, it may be necessary for this brother of mine to furnish some further proofs. These letters only establish the fact of the imposture. They do not prove his identity. He may have stolen the letters somewhere from the rightful heir."

This was a good point, and the detective recognized it at once.

He thought rapidly.

"Has he any other proofs?" repeated the other, turning and facing Thad for the first time.

For the purpose of gaining time for reflection and at the same time bringing his man round to the discussion of another subject in which he was more interested, he answered:

"Yes, he has other proofs."

"What are they?" questioned the other with more animation than he had hitherto exhibited.

"If you noticed, there were frequent allusions in the letters to a certain nurse who had the bringing up of this young man. Do you recall her?"

"Yes. Mrs. James."

"That is the person. Perhaps you also recall several allusions to papers in her possession?"

"I did."

"Well, these papers, in conjunction with these letters, will be sufficient to establish his identity."

This was thrown out as a feeler.

Burr knew perfectly well that the papers in question had been destroyed, and, as he believed, by this same young man, and he watched the effect of his words upon him.

But, to his disappointment, they seemingly had no effect at all.

The young man appeared to reflect, however, and at the end of a minute or two asked:

"Where does this woman live?"

"On Long Island," replied Thad.

"But she has not always lived there?"

"No, I believe not."

"From the letters I should judge that she had lived abroad a good deal."

"She has."

"How long has she lived on Long Island?"

"About five years, I believe."

"At Newtown?"

"Yes."

"I remember her now. I have called on her with my father several times."

"Since she lived at Newtown?"

"Yes, twice."

"Did you go in a carriage?"

Jerome looked a little surprised at this, but answered:

"Yes."

"Your father is a tall man, with gray hair and a florid complexion, is he not?"

"Have you seen him?" asked the young man quickly.

"No, but I have had a description of him."

"Yes, he is as tall as I am, quite gray and rather florid."

"What was the object of your father's visits to this woman?"

"He had no particular object except that she was a poor woman, an old acquaintance, and he therefore took a great interest in her."

"Did he ever give her money?"

"Yes, a great deal of it. On all his visits he gave her large sums of money."

"Have you any idea how much?"

"No, but I know the sums were large, for there was usually a big roll of bank-notes, and I could see that they were of large denominations."

"Did you ever hear the woman complain that he did not give her enough?"

"Sometimes she would grumble that it had been a long time since he had given her any before, and that he had better be a little more prompt."

"Did your father never explain what the payments were for?"

"Not directly."

"When you heard her say that he had better be a little more prompt, did it not arouse your suspicions that something was wrong?"

"I was surprised at it, but supposed it was one of those private affairs that nearly every man has, and never bothered my head about it."

"Did not your father offer any explanation to this particular threat on the part of the woman?"

"Yes; on that particular occasion he did say something. He was very angry, and when we left the house he said to me, 'That is what one gets for his generosity. The more you give these people the more they want. Why, to hear this woman talk, you would think she owned me.'"

"Why do you give her anything?" I ventured.

"I ought not, I suppose," said he, "but—", and then he was silent for a long time, but finally added, "I suppose I owe her something."

"But did not explain what it was for?"

"No, sir."

"Were you not puzzled over the affair?"

"A little; but, as I told you, I am not in the habit of worrying over matters that do not concern me, and not very much over things which really do concern me. What's the use?"

"True, there is not much use," smiled the detective. "Still, you may have reason to worry before you are through with this affair."

"Why so?" he asked coolly.

"The loss of name and fortune—"

"Are no matters for worry," he interrupted. "There is a thing called philosophy which puts all such matters aside."

"Well, what course do you propose to take?"

"None whatever. I have nothing to say in the matter. If your young man has sufficient proof to oust me, well and good. I am ready to pack up and resign at any moment. He is the one to act, not I."

"I must compliment you on your philosophy, I must say," smiled Thad. "Shall you see your brother?"

"If he calls, I will see him," he replied calmly. "It is his place, I believe."

"Now let me ask you, how long is it since you called upon this James woman?"

"Let me see," reflected the young man. "About six months, I should say."

"Has your father called upon her since?"

"He may have. I do not know."

"Was it on the last visit you made with your father that he made the remark you spoke of awhile ago?"

"I believe it was."

"He doubtless did not wish to risk taking you with him again."

"Perhaps, if these letters are to be credited."

"You have never called there alone, I presume?"

"Never."

"Were you aware of the existence of these papers in the old woman's possession?"

"Never until I saw the allusion to them in these letters."

"Your father never hinted at them?"

"Never."

"Nor at these letters?"

"No."

"You were aware that he had been married before?"

"I was not."

"You never had a hint of it?"

"No, sir."

"When did you last hear of the old woman?"

"When I was there with my father."

"Not since?"

"No."

"Do you read the papers?"

"Yes."

"Have you noticed nothing startling lately—a murder, for instance—that attracted your attention?"

"I never read accounts of murders."

All this time the detective had been watching the young man with the keenest scrutiny to see if he could discern any indication of embarrassment or confusion, such as might be expected in a man who had been guilty of the crime he believed this young man to be, and he had utterly failed to remark the slightest indication of it.

He had almost come to the conclusion that he was either innocent or the coolest individual he had ever encountered.

Finally, however, he determined to make a strike that would arouse him, if there was any passion in him.

"If you had been in the habit of reading the murder columns of the papers," he began, "you would have seen that Mrs. Marie James had been murdered."

"Murdered?"

The stroke had apparently had the right effect, for the young man straightened up and became rigid with eagerness.

His eyes dilated nervously, and he even clutched his hands in a suspicious manner.

"Yes, murdered!" rejoined the detective, looking him straight in the eye, and speaking with slow deliberation.

But, after the first paroxysm of surprise, the young man settled back in his seat and became as cold as ever.

"That is too bad," he muttered in the same indifferent manner that he had spoken of everything else. "I wonder what any one could have murdered the old woman for? She couldn't have had a great deal of money, do you think so?"

"The object was not robbery," retorted Thad, vainly endeavoring to arouse him again.

But it was a dismal failure. Jerome simply drawled:

"No?"

"No! The motive was not robbery. It was something of far deeper significance."

"Ah! some one must have had a spite at the old woman? I believe she was a little inclined to be quarrelsome when she was in her cups, come to think of it."

"It was not even a matter of revenge."

"No?"

"No."

Jerome arose slowly and looked deliberately into the detective's face, and the latter studied his countenance carefully, but it was the ingenuous face of a child.

There was no indication of dissimulation there.

"Come," he said, in the most innocent tone, "what the deuce do you imagine could have been the motive? Certainly no one would go about killing harmless old women for the amusement it afforded?"

"No, sir. The murderer had a motive, and very important one—to him, at least."

"Indeed? What was it?"

"The recovery of the very papers we have been speaking about."

"You don't say! But he did not get them?"

"He did."

"The deuce! And still has them?"

"No, he destroyed them, which shows more than anything else that he had a motive."

"So it does, so it does," said the young man musingly. "However, come to think of it, my case is not weakened by that fact, but it is rather tough on the claimant. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, and for that reason some people are inclined to the belief that you may have had a very strong motive for putting the old woman out of the way."

CHAPTER VI.

AN IMPORTANT CLUE.

Burr expected to see Jerome weaken under this almost direct charge, but to his surprise, the young man only smiled and replied languidly:

"It would look that way to an outsider, that is a fact. If the old woman really had these papers in her possession and they are now known to have been destroyed, it would look as though I did it, would it not?"

"Very much," responded the detective dryly. "But of course you would have no difficulty in proving an *alibi*, in case anything of the kind were brought up?"

"Sir?"

"I say, you would have no trouble in proving where you were on the night of the murder."

"That depends upon when the thing occurred. There are times when it would be extremely difficult for me to prove where I was."

"The assassination," explained Thad, still watching his man for some indication of weakening, "occurred on last Friday evening about half-past six o'clock."

"Yes?"

"Can you remember where you were on that night?"

"No, I'll be switched if I can. Too far away. Besides, if I remember correctly, I was a trifle under the weather that night, and had been pretty much all day."

"That is unfortunate."

"How so?"

"Suppose it should happen that you were arrested, charged with the murder, what defense could you make?"

"I do not know. But there is no likelihood of that, I guess."

"Don't be too sure of that. You can never tell where these investigations will stop, when once set on foot, nor who they will implicate. The fact of your being the only person directly interested in the destruction of the papers will go against you, to start with. Besides, it is already known that a young man suiting your description pretty well committed the crime."

"Suiting my description?"

"Yes."

Jerome laughed lightly.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "this is getting interesting."

"Allow me to ask you if you recall how you were dressed on that particular evening."

"For the life of me I can't remember."

"Perhaps you can recollect whether you wore a silk hat or not?"

"Yes, I did wear a silk hat. I remember that, because I got in the rain and spoiled it."

Thad experienced a thrill.

He thought he had struck an important clue.

"What kind of gloves did you wear?"

The fellow laughed.

"That is a strange question," he said.

"Strange, but important," rejoined the detective. "Do you remember the kind of gloves you wore?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't, although my impression is that I wore—"

"Lavender kids?" interrupted Thad.

"By Jove! you've hit it! I did wear lavender kids. I remember now, because they were also spoiled."

Burr could hardly restrain his enthusiasm.

At the same time he could not help pitying this simple young man, who appeared to be unconsciously weaving a net of circumstantial evidence about himself.

He was almost inclined to break off before the poor fellow had incriminated himself any further, but his duty was before him, which his experience had taught him was paramount to everything else.

"But you say you spoiled your hat in the rain," resumed the detective. "How was that, when you had an umbrella?"

"I had no umbrella, that was the trouble."

"Are you sure of that?"

Here was the first break, and it was too important a one to let pass.

"Yes, I am sure, at least I had none when the rain came on."

"But you had one when you started out?"

"I believe I did."

"What did you do with it?"

"That I cannot remember. I am not quite certain that I had one when I started out, but if I had, I must have left it somewhere."

"Where were you when the rain came on?"

"I do not remember."

"In the city or country?"

"In the city, of course."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Did you not take the train for somewhere that afternoon or evening?"

"Probably I did, although I cannot recall anything of the kind now."

"Still, you are not sure that you did not?"

"No."

"Have you the gloves you wore that night still?"

"I believe I have."

"Would it be too much to ask to see them?"

The young man looked at him in surprise. It was the first indication of surprise he had shown.

However, after staring at the detective for some seconds, he burst out laughing, and asked:

"What the deuce do you want to see the gloves for?"

"Oh, I have an object in desiring to see them," returned Thad. "It may be to your advantage to show them."

"And it may to my disadvantage," laughed the other, rising languidly.

"So it may. At the same time, if you should happen to be arrested, you would probably be called upon to show them."

This was an unfortunate blunder, for the young man was acute enough to catch at the hint, and laughingly said:

"In that case, I shall take good care to destroy them, as I did the papers, you know."

However, he went away, and after rather a long absence, returned with a pair of badly soiled lavender kids.

"Here are the incriminating articles," he laughed, handing them to Burr. "Are they the thing?"

Thad took them and examined them carefully.

The first thing he did was to examine the backs of them.

To his surprise and almost horror, there were four distinct scratches on the back of each, unmistakably the result of human finger-nails having been raked across them from the wrists down to the knuckles!

The detective was speechless for a minute or two, and the young man must have noticed it, for he laughed and said:

"Pretty bad wreck, eh? I suppose you'd like to know where I got the scratches on them?"

"I would like to have you explain that," replied Thad dryly.

"Well," returned the other, "if you never

know until I tell you, you'll be a long time without the knowledge."

"How is that?"

"I know no more than you do."

"But I do know."

"Eh?"

"I happen to know," rejoined the detective coolly.

"You must have been on my track that night?"

"Not exactly, but the next thing to it. I know all your movements."

"Indeed? Then I shall be obliged to you if you will enlighten me."

"With pleasure."

Burr then proceeded to trace his movements on the night of Friday, assuming, of course, that he was the identical man who had visited Mrs. James's cottage in Newtown, using the knowledge he possessed, and piecing out with imagination where his actual or circumstantial knowledge ran short.

But when he expected to produce any impression on the young man by the recital, he was greatly disappointed.

"Most remarkable story," laughed the young fellow. "One would suppose you had dogged my steps from the time I left the house until I returned. And I am supposed to be the hero of this wonderful drama, am I?"

"It looks very much like it."

"In which case, I shall not only lose my name and inheritance, but, possibly, my head?"

"That is what it looks like."

"But, suppose I can prove that I was at Delmonico's from six till ten?"

"That will be favorable to your case, if you can do it. But you can probably do nothing of the kind."

"Why not?"

"Because you have already admitted that you were not certain where you were."

"Which is perfectly true, but other people, who were with me, may know. The fact that I left with a certain friend and returned with the same would indicate that we were together all evening, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, such is the case."

Thad was perplexed.

This was the first indication that the young man had any desire to prove an *alibi*, and was consequently the first sign of his weakening.

But if he should be able to prove what he claimed, the detective's case, which he imagined so strong, would crumble like a heap of sand.

"Who is this companion?" finally questioned Burr.

"His name is Montague, and he is president of the Obelisque Club. He is a member of the Stock Exchange, and lives three doors below here, in Fifth avenue."

Having got all the information he desired out of the young man, and being anxious to meet this man Montague and get his version of the story, Thad picked up his hat and said:

"Very well, Mr. Jerome. I shall leave you now. I may have occasion to see you again in a few days."

"Thanks. Come any time," drawled Jerome. "Good-day. When may I expect a call from the police?"

"That depends upon what your friend has to say."

"If his report favors your story, I presume I may expect them round very soon, eh?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

As Thad walked away and the young man closed the door the former heard the latter indulge in another of his languid peals of laughter, and repeat, apparently to himself:

"A most remarkable story, by Jove!"

Thad hurried out and took the cab, which was still waiting for him, and in a few minutes was back at his own home.

Donald must have been watching for him, for he had hardly got inside before the other rung the bell.

"What luck?" he gasped, as he rushed in a moment later.

"Better than I expected," replied Thad.

"You found my brother, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"What is he like?"

"He is a very singular, at the same time a very intelligent and fine-looking young man."

"Did you show him the letters?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He took it very coolly. Said that there was no doubt that you were the rightful heir, and appeared perfectly indifferent to the situation."

"You don't think he will offer any resistance, then?"

"I hardly think so; besides, if he does, it will do him no good, as he is guilty of the murder of Mrs. James, if I am not greatly mistaken, and that will take him out of your way."

"That is good. But does he realize that there is any suspicion against him?"

"Yes, he understands it thoroughly!"

"How does he take it?"

"As indifferently as he did everything else."

"He must be a cool one."

"I never saw his match for coolness."

"Will he set up any defense?"

"He mentioned a party who, he says, was with him the night of the murder. I shall see the party this evening, and the young man's fate depends largely upon his report."

"So far as you know, does the evidence point to my brother?"

"Circumstantially, yes. Besides, as we discussed, there was a decided motive for him to put the old woman out of the way, a greater motive than any one else could have had."

Donald appeared delighted with this news, and grew more cheerful than Thad had seen him for weeks.

"So the chances are that I shall not need the papers supposed to be in the possession of the old woman, after all," he said.

"That is true. You certainly will not if we succeed in proving him guilty of this murder. But you had better call upon your brother now and see what you can learn, and especially find out what he thinks about abdicating in your favor."

"Yes, I shall call upon him either to-night or to-morrow."

"You had better make it to-night. The sooner we get through with this business the better."

"Very well, it shall be to-night."

"That is good. The place I am going to is but a short distance from there, and we will go up together."

Accordingly about seven o'clock the two men took a hack and drove up Fifth avenue, Thad stopping at the residence of Mr. Montague and Donald going on a few doors further to the house of his newly-found father, it being agreed that they were to meet after their respective interviews and return together.

Thad was fortunate enough to find his man at home, and after introducing himself, came to the point at once.

Gilbert Montague was a man of about Francis Jerome's own age, and showed plainly that he was a man of the world.

"Do you remember being in the company of Francis Jerome on Friday evening last, Mr. Montague?" question Thad.

"Yes, and no," replied the other, smiling significantly.

"What do you mean?"

"I was with him till about half-past five, and then he disappeared and did not show up again till about nine, and we came home together."

"Where had he been in the mean time?"

"Goodness only knows. He could not tell, but he was a sight."

"What do you mean by a sight?"

"He was wet and muddy, and somebody had hit him or his nose had been bleeding, for his clothes were covered with blood."

"Could he give no explanation of this?"

"None whatever."

CHAPTER VII

THE WHITE DEMON.

THE case appeared to be so clear against Francis Jerome now that the detective hardly deemed it necessary to go any further.

About the only thing to be done now, it seemed, was to procure a warrant and have him arrested.

Of course there was nothing but circum-

stantial evidence against him, but the detective believed it to be strong enough, in conjunction with the letters, which would prove the motive, to convict him.

He had little hope that the young man would ever weaken and confess.

He was too stubborn and too cool for that.

But, believing that still more evidence would accumulate as he went along, he made up his mind to procure a warrant the first thing the following morning and place the young man under arrest.

With his mind thus made up, he left the house of Gilbert Montague, and strolled slowly along toward the house of Manton Jerome, the father of the two young men, hoping to meet Donald.

He had arrived nearly opposite the house when his attention was attracted by a woman dressed in pure white, approaching from the opposite direction.

He did not see where she had come from at first, and supposed that she had come out of one of the neighboring houses, as she could not have come far in that costume, he thought.

She came straight on until she reached the stoop and, without appearing to notice him, hastily mounted the stoop.

Thad then saw that she was dressed in what appeared to be a wedding trousseau, including the veil, which covered her face.

She hurried up the steps and appeared to be on the point of ringing the bell, but she did not do so, and, after hesitating a moment, hurriedly descended the steps again and hastened away up the street in the direction from which she had come.

Burr watched her with a good deal of interest, wondering where she had come from and where she was going.

She had not gone far, however, when he noticed a dark shadow near the curb which, as he examined it more closely, proved to be a carriage.

The vehicle stood nearly a hundred yards from where the detective was, but he plainly saw the woman enter it, after which it drove off.

It came down the street past him, however, and Thad strained his eyes to discover who was inside, but without success.

He could not even make out whether the woman in white was in the carriage or not, although he knew she was.

Burr was still standing gazing after the receding carriage and wondering who the woman could have been and where she was going, when the front door of the Jerome mansion opened, and he had just time to step back and conceal himself in the shadow when Donald came out, and was accompanied to the door by Francis.

A few words in a subdued tone passed between them, and then the door closed and Donald started to descend the steps.

He had taken but a step or two, however, when something appeared to attract his attention and he stepped back into the vestibule, and hastily picked something from the floor.

From where Thad stood it had the appearance of an envelope, but whatever it was, the young man appeared to know the nature of it, for he thrust it into his pocket without so much as stopping to examine it, and then hurried down the steps.

As he reached the sidewalk Burr emerged from the shadow and joined him, which caused Donald to jump as though a ghost had appeared before him.

As he turned, the light from the parlor window fell upon his face and Thad saw that it was pale and haggard, as though he had undergone a terrible ordeal.

"Well, my boy," began the detective in a kindly voice, "what success?"

"Very good," he muttered nervously, "but let us not talk here. We may be overheard. Come!"

And he started off in a rapid walk.

Burr followed, and it was with difficulty that he succeeded in stopping him where they had left the carriage standing.

He was so agitated that he appeared to have lost his head completely, but the detective finally got him into the carriage and they started for home.

It was some time, though, before he could get the young man to talk, and then his mind appeared to be a long way from what he was talking about.

"You met your brother, I presume?" ventured Thad.

"Yes, yes," he faltered nervously. "I saw him."

"What did he have to say?"

"It's all up with me!" ejaculated the young man, wildly. "There is no hope! It's all up with me!"

"What is all up with you? What do you mean?"

"I mean that—that—"

He hesitated and appeared unable to proceed, and Thad asked:

"He didn't talk of making a fight over the claim, did he?"

"N—no. He was all right. He is willing to abide by our father's decision, but—"

"Well?"

"That is not the trouble. The trouble is—not with him," he faltered.

"Where is the trouble, then?"

Donald did not answer at once, and the detective could feel his form shake as with an ague.

"What is the trouble?" demanded Thad. "If the young man is willing to abdicate in your favor, what else is there in the way? The evidence, as I told you, is so strongly against him that he will most likely be convicted, and there will then certainly be nothing in your way."

"If he is convicted," muttered the other, as if to himself. "But he will never—"

"What is that?"

But the young man appeared not have heard him, for he kept on muttering to himself.

"My God! Why was I ever such a fool? But it was all her fault! All her fault!"

"All her fault?" questioned Thad.

"Who is she?"

"She? She?" he repeated, dreamily, like a man out of his head. "Why, she—the White Demon—no, no! I did not mean that. I do not know what I am saying. I must have been dreaming, I guess."

"I guess you were."

Donald was wide awake now.

He was evidently conscious of having committed himself, and strove to cover up his words by various subterfuges.

First he tried laughing, but it was a failure.

Then he attempted to convince the detective that he had been joking, but it was all a failure.

What he had said had been too obviously in deep earnest and it had taken deep root with the detective.

For a moment the latter was puzzled to understand the meaning of the strange jargon, but it all came to him presently.

He recalled the lady dressed in white, her strange conduct, and then of the young man picking up the letter on the step.

There lay the secret of his agitation, evidently. The White Demon was undoubtedly this woman, and she was playing an important part in this mysterious drama.

After a good deal of reflection the detective determined to try to arouse him from his lethargy and learn something, if possible, of the mystery.

"You have had bad news, my young friend," he began. "Confide in me, and tell me what it is. You know you have no better friend than I am, and no one is more ready to assist or advise you."

"I know that," replied Donald, "but do not ask me to tell you what it is, for I cannot tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because—because—there is nothing to tell," he finally made out to stammer, and followed it with a forced laugh.

"But I know there is, and it is your duty to tell me. I can doubtless assist you."

"No, sir, you cannot."

"I am sure I can, if you will only tell me what your trouble is, and I shall be only too glad to do it."

"It is very kind of you, but honestly, there is nothing."

"What occasioned your agitation?"

"I do not know—I am not feeling well, I guess."

"There is something more than that. Come, I would not press you if I did not feel it my duty to find out your trouble and help you out of it."

"Again I tell you, there is nothing," per-

sisted the young man impatiently. "Absolutely nothing."

Burr hesitated.

He was more determined than ever to carry his point, but he must adopt other tactics.

It would be necessary to let him know that he was at least partially acquainted with his secret in order to wring the rest from him, so he began by asking the blunt question:

"Who is the White Demon?"

To his surprise and disappointment, Donald broke out in a wild, hysterical laugh.

"The White Demon?" he said. "I don't know. Do you?"

"I have seen her."

"What?"

This had evidently been a surprise to the young man.

He imagined his secret was still sacred to himself, and it took him by surprise to find that the detective knew anything about it.

"I say," rejoined Thad in a slow, calm tone, "that I have seen the woman you call the White Demon."

"The deuce—where?" he finally faltered.

"At the house of your father."

"What?"

He was unable to dissimulate now.

"Yes, at the house of your father, where you have just left."

"Impossible! She would never have—"

But he saw that he was about to commit himself again, and broke off suddenly and forced another laugh.

"If you think she would never have gone there, why were you so much wrought up when you found the letter she dropped for you?" pursued the relentless detective.

"The letter?" cried Donald, now thoroughly dismayed. "I know of no letter."

"See here, my young friend," said Thad sharply, "the sooner you learn that it is useless to attempt to deceive me the better it will be for you. Up to to-night I never believed it possible that you were capable of deceit, and it grieves me sorely to find that you are. I saw the woman whom you call the White Demon go to the house and drop the letter which you now have in your pocket, and I also saw you pick it up. I also know that that was the cause of your agitation—the reason you were nervous to get away from the place before saying anything lest she might be lurking in the neighborhood and overhear you. Is this not the truth?"

Donald hesitated.

He was thoroughly cornered, and there was no escape, but still he would not give in.

"I'll swear," he said, "that if you saw any one, I know nothing about her."

"You do not deny picking up a letter on the door-step?"

"I—I—yes, I picked up something, but I do not know what it is."

"Why did you go back and pick it up, then?"

"Out of curiosity."

"And you are sure that you do not know where it came from?"

"Yes."

"You will have no objection to my seeing it, then?"

"No—that is—I had rather you would not see it," he stammered.

"Why?"

"It is nothing that could interest you."

"How do you know?"

"I feel sure of it."

"Then it probably does not concern yourself."

"Yes, I think it does."

"How can you surmise this, when you say you do not know what it contains?"

The young man realized that he had got himself into a tighter place than ever.

He twisted and turned and tried desperately to explain away what he had inadvertently let slip, but it was no use. The more he tried the deeper he got, and finally out of sheer pity the detective let up on him, and turned the conversation in another direction.

His confidence in the young man was completely gone, however, and from that moment he determined to watch him.

In the course of time they arrived at home, and Donald lost no time in getting out of the detective's company, which had

grown extremely distasteful to him all of a sudden.

Donald went directly home, and Thad did the same, but the latter did not remain long.

Merely stopping long enough to disguise himself as a tramp, he slipped out the back way, and, passing through a carriage-house which opened upon another street, made a tour of the block and came round in front of Mrs. Jerome's house.

Something had told him that the young man would not remain indoors, and he determined to watch his movements.

Sure enough, he had not long to wait, when Donald came out, closed the front door noiselessly and quickly slipped away into the darkness.

He stole quickly along the street in the direction of Broadway, taking great pains to keep within the shadow of the houses, and Thad was not far behind him.

The young man kept straight ahead on Thirty-fourth street until he reached Seventh avenue, crossed it and went a few doors further toward Broadway, and stopped in front of a large flat-house.

Here he paused long enough to look about and survey his surroundings.

The street was almost completely deserted and, as the young man saw no one in the way but a dirty-looking tramp, he finally ascended the stoop, opened the vestibule door, put a key into the lock of the hall-door, opened it and went in.

Burr then saw that he had made a mistake in disguising himself as a tramp. At least so it seemed then, but as it turned out later it proved to be rather fortunate.

The door was shut in his face, of course, and in that costume he did not dare to ring a bell and demand admission.

He was in a quandary.

Then suddenly there came a stroke of luck.

The door flew open and a man came rushing out upon the stoop glanced wildly about for a second, and then his eyes fell upon the supposed tramp.

"Say, my man," said the man from the house, "do you want to earn some money?"

"Yep," replied Thad, humbly.

"Well, run down there to No.—, and tell the doctor who lives there to come to Wells's flat at once, and I'll give you a quarter."

Off put the detective, and five minutes later returned with the doctor, entering the house at the same time with the medical man.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

THAD followed the doctor up-stairs to the flat of the man who was to pay him the twenty-five cents, but he did not stop to get the money.

As soon as the doctor had gone inside the flat he began to reconnoiter.

This was the second floor, and there were three flats on the floor including this one.

Burr examined the names on the door of each, and not finding what he sought, ascended to the next story.

Here he again examined the names.

The first two did not satisfy him, but the third appeared to interest him, for he stopped to study it.

"J. Donaldson," was the name on the door, and why he should have identified it with the person he sought was only known to his detective perspicacity, but somehow the moment he set eyes upon it he decided that it was nothing more than Donald Jerome transposed and disguised, for a purpose.

He put his ear to the keyhole, but could hear nothing.

Could it be that he was mistaken?

He listened again, and still there was no sound.

Finally he decided to investigate a little further, and climbed to the next floor above.

Here he examined the names, but none of them satisfied him as well as the one below, and he returned.

He now resolved upon a bold stroke.

Determined to accomplish his purpose, he rung the electric bell.

Presently the door was opened and a girl appeared.

"Is Madam Donaldson in?" inquired the detective.

The girl eyed him with a contemptuous expression.

"I don't think she is," was the reply, and the maid was about to close the door.

Just then, however, the face of a lady appeared beyond the girl in the hall.

"Who is it, Kittie?" asked the lady.

"A poor man, mum," answered the girl.

"What does he want?"

The voice was gentle and kindly, and Thad was sure that he had made a mistake.

"I don't know, mum. He asked for you."

The lady pushed forward to the door.

Burr's heart stood still.

She was dressed in pure white.

Not a vestige of anything about her, even to her slippers, but was as white as the driven snow.

Moreover, the woman's hair was of that silver-flaxen tint, so nearly colorless that it was scarcely distinguishable from the lace scarf thrown over her head.

She was young and very beautiful.

She looked the pretended tramp over, and there was nothing of contempt in her expression, but rather of pity.

"What do you want, my poor man?" she asked in a kindly tone.

"I'd like somethin' to do, ma'am, to earn a little money to git a bite to eat, if yer please, ma'am," said the detective, taking off his hat after the manner of professional beggars.

"Really, my poor man, I have nothing for you to do," replied the woman sympathetically. "But if you will wait a moment I'll give you some money with which to get a meal."

"No, thanks, ma'am. I never begged in me life, an' I couldn't think o' takin' yer money, 'less I done somethin' to earn it."

The woman was astonished at this show of independence, and became more solicitous for the poor man's welfare than ever.

"But won't you allow me to give you a few dimes as a token of my admiration of your independence?" she implored. "Come, your little ones will enjoy it just as much as if you earned it by hard work."

Thad was about to offer some further protest, when the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a man in the hall.

He put his head from behind a *portiere*, frowned darkly and demanded:

"Mable, are you going to stand there talking to that tramp all night? If you are, I'm going. Why not toss him a dime and let him go? I'm surprised that they allow such creatures in the house. I shall speak to the janitor."

All this time Burr had held his breath.

His astonishment at sight of the speaker knew no bounds, notwithstanding he had been looking for him.

And no wonder, the man was none other than Donald Jerome!

"I wanted to give him something," answered the woman, "but he is not willing to take it unless he does something to earn it."

"Then let him go about his business," growled the man. "Stay!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I'll give him something to do. Here, fellow, carry this note to the address written on the envelope and wait for an answer. When you come back I'll give you a quarter."

Thad stepped in, hat in hand, to take the note, and as he did so, took occasion to survey his surroundings.

The room into which he was admitted, which was evidently the sitting-room, was elaborately furnished and decorated, and had evidently entailed the outlay of a great deal of money.

"Take that to the address written on the envelope," repeated Donald, handing him the letter, "and wait for an answer. When you get back here I'll give you a quarter."

"Thanks, sir," mumbled the detective, stowing the letter away in the bosom of his ragged coat. "It'll not take me long ter git back, I warrant yer."

With that he shuffled out of the room.

He did not pause to examine the address until he was in the street.

He then approached a light and read the address.

If he had been astonished at finding Donald Jerome in the apartments of the White Demon, he was more than astonished when

he saw the name and address on the envelope.

It read, "Mrs. Laura Jerome, — West Thirty-fourth street, city."

Here was a fresh surprise for the detective.

What could be the meaning of it?

He did not stop to examine the note there, but jumping on a passing street car, returned home.

Once inside of his private office, he set about opening the envelope by a process that admitted of its being revealed without the writer being the wiser of it.

This process consisted of lighting a small spirit lamp over which was suspended a small kettle filled with water. In a minute or so the water was boiling.

Then placing the letter over the escaping steam, the gum on the envelope was soon softened sufficiently to permit of it being opened without so much as soiling the paper.

He then removed the letter from the envelope.

The detective was nervous with excitement.

He was eager to see what secret was about to be revealed to him in this unexpected manner.

But when he had unfolded the letter his heart sunk again.

There was nothing but disappointment for him.

The letter was written in cipher.

It consisted simply of two rows of figures, thus:

1—8—14—24—4—16—2
3—5—7—15—7—9—6

The detective puzzled over this enigma for some time, but could make neither head nor tail of it.

He looked at his watch.

It wanted but a quarter to twelve.

It was necessary that he should deliver the letter and get back to Donald, lest he should miss some other turn in the strange business.

Therefore he decided to postpone the work of deciphering the cipher until another time, so taking his pencil and making a copy of the two rows of figures, he again sealed the letter and hastened away to the house of Mrs. Laura Jerome.

Two fresh surprises were in store for him when he reached the house.

One was that the old lady was still up, and, from the promptness with which she responded to his call for her, it was apparent that she was expecting the note.

The second surprise was that she appeared to be as well as she had ever been in her life, and showed no indications of ever having been ill.

She was very angry, though, and upbraided the tramp for not bringing the letter sooner, just as though it had been any fault of his.

"Have you just come from Mr. Donaldson?" she questioned, angrily.

"Yes'm," replied the tramp.

"You are sure you did not tarry on the way?" she grumbled.

"Never stopped er minit, mum," was the meek reply.

"Because," she went on, tearing the envelope, "this should have been here nearly an hour ago."

"Yes'm? But yer see, I had ter walk."

"Oh. Then you are not to blame. But I do not see how he could have been so stupid as not to have given you car-fare."

The woman then became absorbed in the cipher letter, and the detective employed his thoughts in going over the strange events of the past hour.

First of all, he thought of what the woman said about the letter being due an hour before, and he remembered that he had spent about that length of time in puzzling over the cipher, so that whatever the plot was, it had evidently been pre-arranged to the minute, and he had unwittingly delayed it an hour.

He wondered what the result would be.

Burr had also learned something, and that was that "Donaldson," which he had seen on the door of the flat, was the name the young man assumed for some unaccountable reason.

Meanwhile the woman had puzzled over the cipher almost as much as he had, and at

length appeared to lose her patience, for she muttered ill-naturedly to herself, and finally called the maid.

"Fetch me that little book in there on my desk," she said.

All this time Thad had been standing in the hall and the woman in the parlor door.

The girl brought the book, and the woman returned into the room, closing the door behind her, and leaving the detective standing in the hall.

But his keen eyes had made a discovery which would have been a surprise to her, if she had known it.

As she turned to go into the room, closing the book on her finger, he caught a glimpse of its cover, and in that brief instant read the title.

The book was Owen Meredith's "Lucile," which he knew Donald and his foster-mother both to be very fond of.

This, he knew, must be the key to the cipher letter, and he made a mental note of the fact.

In a short time the lady reappeared and, handing him a letter, said:

"Lose no time in getting back to Mr. Donaldson with that, as much depends on it. Here," she went on, handing him a nickel.

"Don't wait to walk, but take the car."

"Yes'm," muttered the tramp, and thrusting the letter into his bosom, shuffled out.

But he did not hurry as much as the lady had hoped he would, for instead of taking the first cross-town car, he returned immediately to his own study and subjected the envelope to the same process that he had the other one.

When he had succeeded in removing it from its envelope, he found that was also written in cypher, and was as follows:

A—B—C—D—E—F—G—H
8—7—3—52—9—7—7—2
7—10—8—7—6—5—9—2

Without stopping to attempt any interpretation, he merely made a copy of the figures on a slip of paper, as he had done the other, and then resealed the envelope.

This done, he hastened from the house, took the first cross-town car that came along, and was soon back to the Donaldson flat.

Donald was anxiously awaiting his return, but was about as angry as his mother had been at the delay.

"What kept you so long, fellow?" he demanded.

"W'y, ye see, sir," muttered the tramp apologetically, "in de firs' place, I hed ter walk, an' in de nex', I couldn't find de house right away."

"Blockhead!" growled the young man. "I don't see how you could miss the house. However, it was my fault that I did not give you the price of the car-fare."

"In which case," laughed a soft voice at his back, "he wouldn't have been back to-night."

"How is that, my dear?" inquired Donald, turning into the room.

"He would have spent the money for beer," laughed the woman.

"That's so," growled the man. "By the way, that reminds me. I promised the fellow a quarter."

With that he turned back and handed Thad a twenty-five cent piece.

"Is dat all?" murmured the detective.

"Is that all?" grumbled the young man. "Isn't that what you agreed to go for?"

"Yer don't understand, sir. I mean, is dat all yer've got fer me ter do?"

"Yes, that is all, my good man, for the present," he answered in a milder tone. "You might come back to-morrow, though. I might have another message for you then."

"Thank ye, sir," mumbled the tramp, and shuffled out of the door.

Thad was burning with anxiety now.

He was also in a quandary what move to make first.

He was anxious to learn the nature of the plot—for such he believed it to be—which was about to be carried out, and he was at a loss how to discover it.

He was satisfied that he could solve the problem by returning to the house and interpreting the two cipher letters, but while he was thus engaged the chances were the plot would be executed.

If he remained near the flat to watch

the movements of young Jerome he might be able to discover what he was up to, but in that case he would be groping in the dark.

Finally, however, after pondering the matter thoroughly, he decided to choose the latter course, and remain in sight of the flat house.

So, stationing himself in a convenient place on the opposite side of the street, he prepared to watch the movements of any one who should issue from the door.

He was not compelled to wait long, when two persons came forth, a man and a woman.

It was impossible for him to recognize who they were at that distance, but as it was now long after midnight, he guessed that nobody but Donald and the White Demon would be going abroad at that time of night, and decided to follow them.

For once the woman was not dressed in white—if it was she—but in black.

The couple walked as far as the corner of the street, and there took a closed carriage.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CIPHER LETTERS.

BURR was nonplused by this movement on the part of the man and woman, for there was not another vehicle in sight.

However, he was a swift runner, and, although the party drove at a pretty good gait, he succeeded in keeping pace with them, running along the sidewalk, for a block or two, until they reached Broadway, in fact.

Here there was no lack of cabs and vehicles of all kinds.

Hurrying up to an empty cab, he slipped a dollar into the driver's hand, and, climbing into the vehicle, pointed out the retreating carriage, and told him to drive wherever it went.

"Not for er dollar," growled the cabby.

"Certainly not," replied Thad. "You shall have your own price, if you only keep them in sight."

But the driver was not satisfied.

He did not like the looks of the tramp, and evidently did not believe he had any more money.

"Hurry up!" cried the detective, at the same time handing him a five-dollar bill additional. "If you lose sight of those people I'll have you arrested for over-charging."

As he uttered these words, he threw back his coat and, to the cabby's great surprise, exhibited his badge.

That was enough, and the driver mounted his box and laid whip.

The carriage had already made some distance on them, but the cab was not long in overhauling it, and from that on kept within easy sight of it.

The carriage had continued across-town, and in a few minutes' time reached East River.

Thad wondered where they were going, but soon guessed that they intended taking the Thirty-fourth street ferry.

He was mistaken in this, though, for when within half a block of the ferry-house the carriage stopped and the couple got out.

Burr followed their example and, ordering the cabman to wait for him, proceeded to watch the movements of the strange couple.

Donald and the woman walked briskly along toward the river, and when within a few rods of it turned up and walked along the bank for some distance.

Near the river at this place a large gas-works stands, and between the great tank and the river it is very dark at night.

Thad saw the couple making for this shadow, and wondered more than ever where they could be going.

He kept as close behind them as he could without attracting their attention, and was not long in finding out their intentions.

In the midst of the deep shadow lay a boat, only the outlines of which could be discerned in the gloom.

Could it be possible that they were making for the boat?

The question had scarcely suggested itself to him when their actions solved the problem.

Donald stepped into the boat, and a mo-

ment later the woman was lifted in, and both took their seats.

By the time they had done so the detective was within twenty feet of the boat, and then he saw that there were two brawny fellows at the oars.

Thad was in a quandary.

He was anxious to know where they were going and what they were going to do, but would it pay to follow them?

After a few moments' reflection he decided it would, but the next question was to find a small boat.

There were none at hand, and he hurried away in the direction of the ferry-house in search of one.

But all to no purpose.

There did not appear to be a boat anywhere along the shore.

Meanwhile the fugitives' boat had shot out into the stream and appeared to be pulling for the opposite shore.

He abandoned the idea of getting a small boat, and, after watching them until they were about half-way across the river and he felt pretty well assured that they intended landing on the Long Island shore, he went down to the ferry-house and took the first boat that went over.

From the bow of the ferry boat he could watch the small boat without danger of being observed by the occupants, and he noticed as he passed them that they were struggling against a terrible eddy shooting across the foot of Blackwell's Island, caused by a strong flood tide.

The small boat did not appear to be making much head against it, and when the ferry-boat reached the opposite shore Thad saw the small boat suddenly dart behind the jutting end of the island and disappear.

The detective was now more perplexed than ever.

Could they have landed on Blackwell's Island?

It did not seem possible, as nobody was allowed to land there after night, but if they had not, where had they gone?

There was nothing to do but to take the next ferry-boat back to the New York shore, which he accordingly did.

As the boat passed opposite the island on the return he kept a sharp look-out for the fugitives' boat, but it was nowhere to be seen. It was either moored close under the shore of the island in the darkness, or had passed on up, still keeping in the shadow.

He knew this, because he was well aware that it had not had time to reach the New York shore.

The ferry-boat landed and Thad went ashore, disgusted and humiliated with the consciousness that he had been beaten.

It would be folly to try to find them now, and he decided to waste no time with them.

Re-entering the cab, he drove back home.

As he entered his private office, the first things that met his eye were the two cipher letters lying on the desk.

In his perplexity over the mysterious movements of the man and woman, he had forgotten all about these letters, and he now determined to attempt to decipher them.

He was fortunate enough to possess a copy of Lucile, and the first thing he did was to get it out.

Commencing with Donald's letter to his mother, he took the first figure in the top row of figures, which was "1," and, taking it for granted that it referred to the page of the book, turned to the first page. But the first page was blank.

This proved that he had not begun right, and he set to studying the puzzle.

The first figure in the second line was "3," and, acting upon the same theory again, he turned to page three of the book. But he was again disappointed, for there was only the dedication.

For more than an hour he puzzled over the thing, and at last hit upon another plan.

He added the two first figures—1 and 3. The result being 4, he turned to page four of the book.

This was also blank, and he saw that this system would not do.

The next plan was to add the first and second figures of the top row—which were 1 and 8—together. This gave him 9, and he turned to page nine of the book. Then taking the first figure of the second row, which was 3, for the number of the line on

that page, and the second figure, which was 5, for the number of the word in the line, he found the word "escaped."

Making a note of this, he proceeded to add the next two figures of the first row, which were 14 and 24, which gave him 38, and he turned to page thirty-eight. Then third and fourth figures on the second line were 15 and 7, so running his finger down the page till he came to line 15, he counted to the seventh word on the line and found it to be "to-night," and he wrote the word after the first one he had made a note of, which made it read, so far, "escaped to-night."

Thad was so well pleased with his success that he proceeded with the next three figures in the same manner, and the result was that he had "shall we move?"

The whole sentence now read, "escaped to-night. Shall we move?"

Ordinarily this would not have conveyed any meaning whatever, but after the adventure of the earlier part of the night, the detective's mind at once reverted to Blackwell's Island.

Evidently, he thought, there was to be a delivery of one of the prisoners on the island, or rather, it would seem that the prisoner had already escaped, and the plot was to assist him in getting ashore.

But perhaps there would be more light thrown on the mystery in the letter from Madam Jerome to her son.

This was as follows:

A—B—C—D—E—F—G—H
8—7—52—3—9—7—7—2
10—7—8—7—6—5—9—2

This was even worse than the other one.

What puzzled him were the letters in the first line. He could not discover what significance they had.

Finally, however, he decided to proceed without them, and, using the figures as he had in the other letter, he was rewarded by finding this:

"Rescue at all hazards."

This was so palpably the answer to the other letter, that he decided that it must be the correct one, and that the capitals composing the first line were simply placed there as a blind, as also was the final figure, as the sentence was complete without it.

He consulted his watch and found that it was after three o'clock.

In another hour it would be daylight.

Thad went to the window, opened it and looked out.

The weather had changed since he was out. It had clouded up and a steady, sullen rain was falling.

"Just the night for their enterprise," he mused.

And the detective could not rest until he had gone back and made another effort to discover the nature of the plot which was on foot.

At the foot of Thirty-ninth street and East River he found two policemen and notified them of what he suspected was in the wind, and as they happened to belong to the river patrol, they signified their willingness to accompany him in search of the parties.

They had a boat close by, and the three men embarked and pulled out toward Blackwell's Island.

This was no easy matter now, as the wind had raised and the river was extremely rough. Besides, while the rain had almost ceased temporarily, the heavens were overcast and frequent vivid flashes of lightning blazed over the dark waters and deep rumbling thunder could be heard in the distance, which occasionally burst in deafening crashes close by.

The lightning favored our friends, for it was only when a vivid flash lighted up the gloomy scene that it was possible to discern anything.

By this frequent but transitory light the whole face of the waters between the shores and the island was illuminated so that the smallest object would have been visible, but, although the three men strained their eyes, no sign of a small boat was to be seen.

Thus the whole distance to the island was traversed without any discovery, and the policemen began to lose faith in Thad's story.

"I guess the escape, if there was to be any, was from somewhere else," suggested one.

"No, I am confident it was from the island," insisted the detective. "Otherwise, why did they go to the island?"

"It might have been a case of bluff," grumbled the policeman.

"Or perhaps they have already made their way to shore," ventured the other policeman.

"That is possible," acquiesced Thad. "They have certainly had plenty of time since I saw them."

"And as like as not they went the other way."

"Toward Long Island?"

"Yes."

"It is more likely that they would have gone that way than toward New York," asserted one of the men.

"Suppose we pull around that side of the island?" suggested the detective.

"What is the use?" growled one of the men.

"We might run on to them," observed the other policeman.

"It is just possible," said Thad.

Accordingly, in spite of the opposition of one of the men, they rowed around to the opposite side of the island.

By this time the storm had increased in fury to such an extent that it looked as though the frail bark might be capsized any minute.

Blinding sheets of lightning flashed across the dark canopy that overhung them and the deafening crash of the thunder continued in an almost unbroken series of cannonade. The waves rolled and dashed, filling the air with spray and threatening momentarily to engulf the little boat.

They had just rounded the headlands of the island, and a particularly vivid flash of lightning lit up the dark, seething waters, when a small boat was seen to shoot out from the island.

Its nose was pointed for the Long Island shore and the boat contained five people.

"That is our gang, or I'm a goat!" cried the detective enthusiastically.

"What makes you think so?" growled the skeptical policeman.

"There is the right number, supposing them to have rescued a prisoner, and one of them is a woman."

Meanwhile it had grown dark again and everything was obscured from view.

However, taking their bearings from the point at which they had espied the boat, our friends pulled for dear life.

In another instant the lightning favored them again.

There they were, not more than a hundred yards distant, and evidently pulling with all the strength they possessed.

"Pull for them, boys!" cried Thad. "I'm sure it is the right parties."

"Whether it is or not," observed the cheerful policeman, "we must run them down. There is something wrong, or they would not be making off at this time of night."

The two patrolmen leaned upon their oars with a will, while the detective, seated in the stern, handled the tiller and kept the boat in the right course.

As the occasional flashes of lightning lit up the scene it was remarked that they were gaining on the fugitives, and this encouraged the men to greater effort.

Meanwhile the storm momentarily increased in violence.

It required the best skill of the two men at the oars to prevent the boat from swinging round into the trough of the high-rolling billows and becoming swamped.

Very little headway was being made, for the wind came off-shore and drove the waves howling dead in their teeth.

The little boat would plunge into the high-dashing waves, which would split and send its spray in drenching floods over the three occupants.

Again it would rise high upon the rollers, balance, totteringly, on the crest for a moment, and then plunge nose-first into the gulf that followed.

More than an hour had been spent in this vain battle with the mad elements, and still the shore was far away.

Day was breaking, but the dark cloud, the spray and the rain obscured everything and rendered it dark.

A dazzling blaze of lightning burst upon

the gloomy scene and showed them that the fugitives' boat was but a few rods in advance, and just then their own boat capsized, emptying its freight into the water.

CHAPTER X.

A FIENDISH PLOT.

FORTUNATELY Burr was an excellent swimmer, and the moment he regained the surface he struck out for the shore.

At the instant he came to the surface he was startled by a shrill and heartrending scream, which appeared to emanate from the other boat.

It was too dark to see what had happened, or even to tell what had been the fate of his two companions.

What had become of the boat he had not the least idea, and he had no time then to inquire.

As he tossed about on the waves there came a bright flash of light, and he took advantage of it to look about.

Nothing but an upturned boat a few yards away from him met his gaze.

Whether it was his boat or that of the fugitives he could not tell.

But he made for it, and succeeded in getting hold of the craft, which sustained him, and he proceeded to work his way shoreward as best he could.

But it was slow and laborious work, for a good part of the time he was going in the wrong direction, owing to the darkness, and it was only when a flash of lightning came to his relief that he was able to set himself right again.

An hour passed in the terrible struggle, and it began to grow light.

The ferry-boat, which he had heard passing and repassing for some time, but could not see, became visible through the thick mist which now began to lift.

He had vainly tried to make himself heard by the ferrymen during this time, but the din and fury of the storm had drowned his voice.

At length one of the boats came within a few yards of him, and he called out within all the strength of his lungs.

They heard him this time, owing to the abatement of the storm, the boat slowed up, and a boat was lowered and sent to his rescue.

The detective was in a sad plight.

Wet and cold from his long exposure to the water, to say nothing of the wetting he had received before from the rain, he was more dead than alive when he was finally drawn aboard of the ferry-boat.

Nevertheless, he was not forgetful of his companions and inquired whether they had been picked up, the first thing.

If they had, it had been by the other boat, for the people on this knew nothing about them.

They were equally ignorant as to the fate of the passengers in the other small boat.

He made inquiry at the ferry-house (it was on the Long Island side,) but nothing was known about any of the people, and he was forced to the conclusion that all had perished.

Finding no trace of them on this side, he returned to the New York side, but was equally unsuccessful here.

He therefore concluded to return home, and securing a hack, had driven there.

Burr was anxious to ascertain the fate of Donald and the woman, and also to discover, if possible, the nature of the plot projected by them the night before.

Therefore early in the forenoon, having refreshed himself with a good breakfast and put on dry clothing, he called at the house of Mrs. Jerome.

To his surprise, he was informed that the lady was still very ill, and could not be seen by any one.

He knew this to be untrue, and believed it a part of the plot to which the old lady was a party.

It was in vain that he insisted that his business with her was urgent, the servant's orders had been imperative, and she would not be induced to show the detective into the apartment of the alleged sick woman.

Thad then inquired for Donald.

He was at home, the servant said, but was not feeling well and wished to be excused.

The detective was discomfited, but not defeated.

One more recourse lay open to him.

He would call at the flat of the White Demon, and see what he could learn there.

He called and was met at the door by the maid who had met him the night previous.

"Is your mistress in?" he asked.

"Yes, but very ill," was the response.

"May I not see her?" he inquired.

"She will not see anybody," replied the servant, preparing to close the door.

Just then a voice from the other room called out:

"Who is it?"

"A gentleman who wants to see you, mum," answered the maid.

"Who is he?"

"I don't know, mum."

Here the girl looked inquiringly at the detective.

"Tell her it is a lawyer who has the case of her husband in hand, and wishes to see her very particularly."

This was communicated to the lady, and, after some delay, she invited him to come in.

When Thad came into the presence of the woman he was astonished at what he saw.

The woman was propped up with a number of pillows on a divan, and everything about her was snowy white.

She was even more beautiful than he had imagined from the slight glimpse he had had of her the night before, and if she was sick she certainly did not show any indications of it.

Indeed, the detective was of the opinion that she looked remarkably healthy.

She eyed the detective closely as he entered the room, without rising, and calmly invited him to be seated.

"So you are a lawyer, and have the case of Mr. Donaldson in hand, eh?" she said.

"Yes, madam," replied Thad.

"What is his case?" she asked quickly.

Burr was astonished.

"Why, don't you know?" he questioned, half believing that she was playing upon him.

"Never heard of it. I cannot imagine what case he can have, unless he has been up to some more rascality. And in that case, if you are defending him, you'll get neither information nor sympathy from me!"

Here was a surprise for the detective.

What could it mean?

Had they had a tiff? Or was this another ruse like that of Donald when he pretended that he and his foster-mother had had a quarrel?

"I'm surprised at that," was all he could make out to say.

"You needn't be," she retorted quickly.

"If you knew what I have undergone at his hands you wouldn't be surprised at anything."

"Indeed, he always speaks in the highest terms of you."

"That's funny," she sneered. "I am surprised that he should have spoken of me at all."

"Why so?"

"Why, it was only yesterday that his mother knew anything about me, or that I knew of the existence of his mother."

Thad was a little puzzled, and was about to ask which mother she referred to, when she interrupted him by saying:

"We have been married nearly two years, and he has always led me to believe that his father and mother were both dead."

"He was right with regard to his mother. She is dead. But his father is living. However, he has only known about it a week or so."

She raised herself on her elbow and stared at the detective.

"You tell me that his mother is dead and that his father is still living?" she demanded.

"Yes."

She looked at him a long time before speaking again.

At length she said, speaking in slow, measured tones:

"Then he is a bigger liar than I imagined. He just told me yesterday that his mother was alive, but that his father was dead."

"He certainly is the liar you say if he told you that. It is with regard to his father that the case refers."

"What is it about that, anyway?" she questioned sneeringly.

Thad outlined the story of the false heir in as few words as possible.

She laughed derisively.

"Do you believe that?" she asked.

"Why not?"

"Because there is no truth in it."

"But I happen to know there is."

"What proof have you? Anything beyond his word?"

"Yes, I have ample proof."

"What is it?"

He told her about the letters.

The woman screamed with laughter.

"And you pinned your faith on that, did you?" she laughed.

"Yes, certainly. Why not?"

"Don't do it."

"Why not?"

"They are spurious."

"What?"

"The letters."

"What do you mean?"

"He wrote them, every one."

"Impossible!"

"There is nothing impossible in the way of rascality with that man."

"Perhaps, in intention, but he could not have imitated all those letters."

"Yes he could."

"Have you seen them?"

"No, but I know him."

"But you are mistaken with regard to the letters. They are undoubtedly genuine."

"You cannot make me believe it. Has the father seen them?"

"No, but as soon as he returns I shall show them to him."

"And when you do, see if he does not tell you the same as I do, that they are spurious."

"If he does, I shall probably believe it. But if Donald Jerome wrote those letters he is a cleverer man than I take him to be."

"Oh, he gave you his right name, did he?" she screeched, with another burst of derisive laughter.

"Certainly. I never knew he had any other name till last night."

"And I never knew that he had any other name than Edward Donaldson till yesterday."

"How did you find out then?"

"I found a letter in his pocket addressed to the name of Donald Jerome, and faced him in it, and he finally admitted that that was his right name."

"How did he come to tell you that he had a mother living?"

"I saw him on the street with an old lady, and asked him who she was. At first he tried to deceive me, but I let him know that he could not, and he finally told me it was his mother."

"It was a woman whom he has known as mother for a good many years. She, in fact, brought him up, and it was only upon the discovery of these letters that he found that she was not his mother, and that his father, who is a rich man, was living."

"All a plot," she averred. "That old woman is as much of a rogue as he is. Why, do you know what they tried to do last night?"

"I have no idea."

"They tried to drown me!"

"You don't say! How was that?"

"I'll tell you, but this must be on the dead quiet."

"Certainly."

"I have a brother confined on Blackwell's Island for—well, a crime, and Ned—"

"Is that your brother's name?" interrupted Thad.

"No, that is what I call Donaldson, or Jerome."

"Oh."

"He told me last night that my brother had escaped from the prison, and that he was going over and assist him in getting ashore."

Burr began to open his eyes.

"As soon as he told me this, I was bound to accompany him. I am afraid of nothing. He did not want me to go—at least he pretended that he did not, but of course the whole plot was got up for a certain purpose."

"And that was?"

"To drown me."

"How do you know this?"

"I know from his actions, and from a letter from his mother."

"What did the letter from his mother say?"

"Here it is," she said, handing him a slip of paper.

Thad saw at a glance that it was the very cipher letter he had copied and interpreted.

She laughed when she saw the detective puzzling over it.

"You don't make much out of it, do you?" she laughed.

"Yes, I can read it," he replied. "But I see nothing that would lead me to believe he wanted to drown you."

"What does it say?" she questioned, still laughing.

"It simply says 'Rescue at all hazards!'"

"That is what it says, but it is not what it means. These people have a language, you must understand, that means exactly the opposite of what it says. Read properly, it means put her out of the way at all hazards. I would not have noticed this if it had not been for what happened last night."

"What was that?"

"You know there was a terrible storm?"

"Yes."

"When we got within half-way of the shore, one of the men grasped me and tried to throw me overboard."

"That was when you screamed, wasn't it?"

"What?"

Thad, in his excitement, had let slip a secret.

"I say that you must have screamed when he tried to do this," he said, turning it off in that way.

"Yes, I did scream, but that was not all. I stabbed the fellow, and he fell overboard."

"How did you get ashore, then?"

"I compelled the other fellow to row me ashore."

"What has Donald to say in explanation?"

"Oh, he pretended that he knew nothing about it, that it was entirely the work of the villainous boatman."

"He was afraid to attempt it himself, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"No wonder they call you the 'White Demon,' then."

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN.

THE woman regarded Thad with surprise when he pronounced the name of the White Demon.

She appeared about equally divided between the notion of getting angry and bursting into laughter.

She finally chose the latter, however, and her peculiarly musical voice rung out as clear as a bell.

"Where did you ever hear that name?" she cried.

"I heard it from a certain party," laughed the detective.

"I'll bet I can tell you who it was."

"Perhaps you can."

"It was Ned."

"You are right."

"How did he come to tell you?"

"He did not exactly tell me. He let it drop unintentionally," explained Thad.

"Just like him," sneered the woman.

"By the way, how did he ever come to give you such a name as that, or was it he that gave it to you?"

She laughed again.

"There is something funny about it," she finally said.

"Yes?"

"Yes."

"How was it?"

"You may or may not have noticed that I have a decided weakness for white?"

"I have noticed that you frequently wear it, although you didn't wear it the other night."

"Eh?"

She opened her eyes very wide.

"The night—that is, last night—it seems like a year," mused the detective.

"You saw me, then?"

"Yes, from the time you left the flat here till you disappeared while in the boat, at the moment you uttered the scream."

She stared at him harder than ever.

She appeared to be unable to make out whether he was telling the truth or jesting.

"Say, that wasn't you in the boat that capsized, was it?" she cried at length.

"So it was."

"What—what—why, of course, you escaped. I was going to ask what became of you, for we thought you were lost."

"Had your companions any idea who we were?"

"Yes, they thought you were river patrol."

"But they did not know what we were after?"

"They did not think you were after anything in particular. They supposed you were merely patrolling to see if anybody was in danger, that is all."

"What did you think when you saw us capsize?"

"I was worried, and wanted them to go after you and try and pick you up."

"But they wouldn't, eh?"

"No, they said that if you couldn't take care of yourselves, it was no business of theirs."

"But you haven't told me about how he came to call you the White Demon," interposed Thad.

"And you haven't told me what you were doing out on the river at that time of night, or morning, rather," she laughed.

"Oh, I was out with the river patrol, that is all."

"For pleasure?"

"Yes, and the excitement."

"There was excitement enough, but I fail to see where you found the pleasure on such a night as last night."

"The pleasure came from the excitement."

"That is all right, but you had another motive for being out there."

"Why do you think so?"

"I know it."

"Well?"

"You were there to watch us."

"How do you know that?"

"I am not blind."

"No?"

"The fact of your being able to read that cipher letter and that you followed me from the flat, shows me that you were out there for a far different purpose than pleasure. You were there to watch us. You knew, or thought you knew, something about Ned's plot to rescue my brother, and were out with the patrol to capture us."

"You come pretty near the truth, but how do you suppose I discovered the plot?"

"I have no idea."

"I may tell you some time, if you answer my questions pretty well."

"Tell me now."

"No, not now. Later I will, though."

"Very well."

"Now, you said a while ago that Ned, as you call him, wanted to drown you. Why did he wish to do that?"

"To get rid of me, of course."

"Why should he want to get rid of you?"

"Because I know too much for him."

"Know too much?"

"Yes of his rascality."

"What, for instance?"

"I cannot tell now. Later on I may."

"But you haven't told me why he called you the White Demon," persisted the detective.

"That is so. Well, it was like this. I had foiled him in one of his schemes and he was going to kill me, that is he threatened to, and even went so far as to draw a knife, but I was too quick for him, and got the drop on him with a pistol. As usual I was dressed in white. I couldn't help laughing at the funny look he gave me when he saw that I had the drop on him. He showed his teeth just like a dog, and growled: 'Oh, well, you white demon, you've got the drop on me this time, but I'll have you yet!'"

"Has he ever attempted it since?"

"Yes, several times, but I always got the drop first."

"You followed him last night—early in the evening—didn't you?" said Thad.

This was another surprise for her.

"Up Fifth avenue?" he went on.

She still stared, but was evidently too much astonished to answer his question.

"You went up the stoop of a house near

Seventy-second street, and dropped a letter for him and then went away."

"Were you following me then?" she questioned, with a look of dismay.

"No."

"How did you happen to see me, then?"

"By accident."

"But you were there for some purpose?"

"Yes, I had been calling on another person a few doors from there and went to the place where I saw you to meet Donald."

"Did you go up together?"

"Yes."

"Did you meet him after he came out of the house?"

"I did."

"How did he act?"

"He was greatly excited, so that I could not get him to talk."

"Did he say anything about me?"

"Yes, he muttered something about the White Demon."

She laughed.

"And you knew it was I whom he meant?"

"I guessed it was."

"Why?"

"Because I knew that you had dropped the letter, and I saw that you were in white."

"And you guessed the rest?" she laughed.

"Yes."

"Did he say nothing about me afterward?"

"Not a word. Now let me ask you, did you know who lived at that house where you dropped the letter?"

"His mother."

"He told you that?"

"Yes."

"His father lives there, but not his mother."

"You told me his mother was dead."

"So she is."

"But he told me his mother lived there. But that is nothing strange. He is capable of any lie."

"He wrote his mother, or foster-mother, last night, did he not?" questioned Thad.

"Yes, I believe he did."

"And sent it by a tramp?"

She stared at him.

"Why, you seem to know everything!" she cried.

"A few things, only. But answer my question, please."

"What is the use, when you already know more about it than I do?" she laughed.

"Well, when he directed the letter did you not see the address he wrote?"

"No. That is, I did not notice."

"You did not know, then, that his foster-mother lived in this street?"

"I did not."

"Well, she does."

"Does he also live there?"

"Yes."

"I shall see him, and her too."

"But what was the letter you dropped on the door-step for him last night?"

The woman burst out into a hilarious fit of laughter.

"Oh, that was a little warning I was giving him."

"What about?"

"He told me he was going somewhere else. I did not believe him and followed him. I wanted him to know that I knew where he really had gone."

"Are you sure that was all there was in it?"

"Yes, that was all."

"I cannot imagine why he should have acted as he did, if that is true."

"How did he act?"

"Why, he was so much agitated that he could not talk, and what seems so remarkable, he had not even looked at the letter. How was it possible for him to know even that the letter was from you?"

"He knew well enough from the envelope. Besides, I told him he need not be surprised if I followed him and found out where he was going."

"You followed him to the place, then?"

"I did."

"Where from?"

"I saw him enter a hack on Ninth avenue just below here."

"Did you not see another person with him?"

"Yes, I saw a gentleman get in with him."

"Did you notice who it was?"

"No."

"Did he resemble me?"

"To tell you the truth, I was so angry I did not notice what the other man was like."

"So you took another carriage and followed him, eh?"

"Yes."

"Where had he told you he was going?"

"To Newtown."

A thrill ran through the detective.

Could it be that this fellow had also had something to do with the murder?

Up to that moment he had never suspected Donald of complicity in this affair, the evidence pointed so directly at Francis Jerome.

"What was he going over there for?"

"He did not go."

"I know he did not, but he pretended that he was going."

"Yes."

"What was his excuse for going?"

"Oh, he often goes over there to visit an old nurse who brought him up, so he claims."

"When was he over there before?"

"I do not know. He frequently says he is going, but whether he does or not, I can not tell."

"Was he there last Friday night?"

"I don't know."

"He was away from you, was he?"

"Yes."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"If he did, I do not remember it."

"Did you see him at all that night?"

"Yes."

"What time?"

"He came in after twelve."

"You know it rained that night? Was he wet?"

"Very. He had been out in the rain."

"Did he say nothing about where he had been?"

"Not a word."

"Did you ask him?"

"Yes, but he put me off."

"Have you heard him say anything about the old woman being murdered?"

"His old nurse?"

"Yes."

"No, has she been murdered?"

The woman appeared to be greatly excited now, and for the first time, arose to a sitting posture.

"Yes, she was murdered last Friday night."

"Have they found out who the murderer is?" she asked eagerly.

"No, but certain parties are being watched."

"Ned?"

"No, another party."

"Why not him?" she asked, the cynical expression Thad first noticed in her face returning.

"To which I might answer by asking why should he be watched?"

"Because, in my opinion, if anybody needs watching, it is he."

"Why?"

"He is the most likely to be the guilty one."

"Do you know anything about it?"

"No, but he has often expressed the wish that she was out of the world!"

CHAPTER XII.

ON A NEW TACK.

THE woman's hint set the detective to thinking.

If there was anything in her theory he would have to start upon a bran new tack.

He himself was far from satisfied with the conduct of his old friend for the past few days.

He had made discoveries about the young man's life which he never would have supposed possible.

But even with all this he could not think him capable of what the woman had hinted.

Moreover, it was evident that she was greatly put out with him for some reason, and, being a spiteful, if not an unprincipled woman, she was likely to say anything which would get him into trouble.

However, there might be some foundation for her theory, and it would do no harm to question her and learn as much as there was to be learned, before leaving her.

"You say that you have heard him express the wish that the old woman was out of the world," he began. "What reason did he assign for this wicked wish?"

"Oh, he had several reasons for wanting her out of the way," answered the woman.

"What were they?"

"Well, one was that he said she knew all about his low birth, and that as long as she lived he could never hope to be anything but an ordinary man."

"While that might have worried him to the extent of wanting to put her out of the way, some time ago, his discovery of the letters proves that he is not of low birth, but belongs to one of the best families in the city, and he could no longer have any motive for putting the old woman out of the way on that account. In fact, the papers in her possession were all that were necessary, in conjunction with these letters, to prove his name and title to the fortune of his father. Why should he want to kill the woman and destroy the papers?"

"That proves more than anything else," murmured the woman with a sneering expression, "that the letters were not genuine. I know something more about this matter than you think I do."

"I have no doubt of it, and it was for that reason that I came to see you. He has evidently told you a good deal about himself, has he not?"

"Not a great deal. Very little, in fact. What I know I found out in another direction."

"What have you learned?"

"Well, one of the things I have learned is that he is not the heir who was supposed to have been brought up by Mrs. James."

"No?"

"No."

"You astonish me."

"I was astonished myself when I learned it."

"But what do you mean by saying that he is not the heir who was brought up by Mrs. James?"

"That and nothing more. The boy whom Mrs. James brought up died when he was about twelve years old."

"Who is this fellow, then?"

"He is the son of the widow Jerome, whose right name, by the way, is Donaldson."

"Donaldson is his right name, then?"

"Yes."

"What was her object in representing himself as Jerome?"

"Can't you see?"

"I think I do, if your theory is correct."

"A blind man could see, I should think."

"As soon as the boy died, according to your theory, then, this woman began to represent herself as the widow of Jerome and her boy as the wronged heir?"

"That is it."

"You think the letters are forgeries, though?"

"I do."

"Might they not be the letters written by Jerome to his first wife?"

"They might. I hadn't thought of that."

"And the papers in the old woman's possession?"

"Would have proved that the rightful heir was dead."

"Ah, I see. There is a good deal of plausibility about your theory, but what facts have you?"

The woman was silent.

She apparently had not expected to be called upon for a confirmation of her words.

"Why, all I know about it I got from old Mrs. James herself," she finally said, "and she allowed me to look at the papers."

"And now that both are destroyed, there is nothing left to prove your assertion."

"That is true," she admitted, ruefully.

"And it is, therefore, worthless."

"Probably, but I'll make myself heard, anyway."

"But you said awhile ago, when I asked you about it, that you knew nothing about his discovery of the letters and the fact that he had found a father."

"I did not."

"And now you say that the old woman told you that he was not the heir she brought up. Did not that lead you to believe that he was an heir of some one?"

"Yes, I knew that he thought he was the son by a former wife of some rich man,

and he expected that some day this rich man would provide for him."

"Ah, I see. You did not know, then, until I told you, that he was supposed to be the real heir whose place was being usurped by another person?"

"No, sir, the first I ever heard of that was what you told me awhile ago."

"How did the old woman come to tell you that he was not the boy she had brought up?"

"Why, you see this woman was paying her to pretend that he was the heir, but lately she hadn't been paying her regularly or as much as she thought she ought to have, so once the old woman came over here to see Ned. He was very angry because she came to see him, and they had quite a row, and he finally went away, promising to get her some money. She waited a long time, but he did not come back, and then she flew into a passion and went away also. In an hour or two she came back to see if he had returned, and she was pretty tipsy. Ned had not yet returned, and she let out on him. Then it was that she told me all about it."

"Was it then that she showed you the papers?"

"No, that was one time when I was over at her house in Newtown."

"She had asked him for money, as usual, and he promised to get it for her, and went away ostensibly for that purpose, but he did not go back. Then she became angry and told me again that he was not what he represented himself as being, and that one of these days she would let out on him. To prove her words, she then showed me the papers."

"Did you speak to him about this matter?"

"Yes, as soon as I got back to the city I asked him about it."

"What did he say?"

"He denied it. Said the old woman was a liar, and that he would get even with her for it."

"He did not say anything about the papers, did he?"

"No, and I did not tell him that I knew anything about them."

"And during all this time he had said nothing to you about his mother, eh?"

"Not a word."

"H hadn't the old woman told you anything about her?"

"She said that his mother was living, but said nothing about who or where she was?"

"Well," said Thad rising, "I shall look into this matter, and in the meantime I wish you would keep what I have said to yourself, and at the same time keep your eyes open for any facts which tend to prove what you have told me."

"I shall do so," replied the woman, also rising. "When shall I see you again?"

"I will call in to-morrow, if it is agreeable."

"It will be, for I shall be glad to know what progress you have made."

"Very well, to-morrow it shall be then. What name shall I call you, by the way?"

"Oh, Mrs. Donaldson," she replied with a significant shrug of the shoulders and an equally significant look out of her wonderful eyes.

"Very well. Good-by, Mrs. Donaldson."

"Good-by, Mr.—"

"Robinson," interjected Thad.

"Which is as much your name as Donaldson is mine," she laughed, "but never mind. We are quits on that."

It was after noon when the detective left the flat, and he pondered for some moments whether he would carry out the intention of the night before—of procuring a warrant for Francis Jerome and arresting him, but the more he thought of it, in the light of recent developments, the less inclined he was to do it.

In spite of the circumstantial evidence against the young man, his conduct had not appeared to Thad as that of a guilty man, while the developments of the past twelve hours had had much to do toward altering his views in regard to the matter.

Under these considerations, he finally decided not to push the matter for the present.

He therefore turned his steps homeward, and as he walked along another matter occupied his thoughts a good deal.

In spite of the fact that Donald had

christened the woman he had just left, "The White Demon," the detective was deeply impressed with the fact that she was not only a very gentle woman, but a very intelligent one. So he came to the conclusion that she was either a very clever actress, or that she had been greatly belied by this man whom Thad had so long looked upon as a model young man.

Finally he reached home, but instead of entering his own house, he went straight to that of Mrs. Jerome.

The girl at the door informed him that the madam was very much worse and could not be seen by anybody.

Donald, however, consented to see him, but would not talk until they had gone over to Thad's private office.

That suited the detective admirably, but it is likely that the young man would have been less anxious to go had he known what was in store for him.

When they reached the little office and Thad had closed the door, he took occasion to have a good look at the young man, and he was astonished at the change that had come over him.

He was pale and his face was drawn like a man of at least ten years his senior, and the frank expression which he had been accustomed to was no longer there, and in its stead a hang-dog look such as he would have expected in a thief.

"There are a few questions I wish to put to you, Donald," began the detective in the mildest tone possible.

"Yes?" rejoined the young man dejectedly.

"You did not tell me what your brother had to say last night. You were greatly agitated at that time, and I did not urge you. Now, however, I should like you to tell me what was the result of your conference."

"There was nothing worth mentioning," replied Donald wearily, "more than you experienced. I went there and informed him who I was, and stated the nature of the proofs I had for establishing my claim, to which he answered that he had seen the letters and had no doubt of the validity of my claim, and that as soon as his father got back and he had a talk with him, he was ready to abdicate in my favor."

"He did not appear inclined to fight the thing at all, then?"

"No, he did not talk so."

"Then you have nothing to fear."

"I hope not."

"What did you mean last night when you left the house, by saying that there was no hope for you?"

"I do not know what I meant. I was so overwrought by the torture which I have endured during the past week that I was half crazy."

"Now tell me honestly, my boy, had not the letter which you found on the doorstep something to do with your agitation?"

Donald started at the mention of the letter, and it looked for a little while that he would not be able to make any reply, but he finally mastered his emotions, and said:

"How could it? You know yourself that I had not looked at the letter when we entered the carriage."

"That is true. Still, I am at a loss to know what you meant by muttering about a certain person, who appeared to be the secret of your agitation."

Donald was silent and dropped his head.

"The person I allude to," pursued Thad, "you called by the very queer cognomen of the 'White Demon.' Who is she?"

"I do not know," he murmured in a broken voice.

This was almost too much for Thad, who, up to a few hours before, had never known the young man to be guilty of a lie.

He nearly lost his patience now, however.

"Look here, Donald," he began, looking him straight in the eye, "if anybody had told me two days ago that you could sit there before me and tell me a willful lie, unblushingly, I would have branded him as the blackest liar that ever breathed!"

"What do you mean, sir?" cried the young man with a sudden burst of energy or bravado, jumping to his feet.

"I mean that when you tell me that you know nothing of the person you call the White Demon, you lie, and you cannot deny it! Sit down."

Donald made some further protest, but the detective shut him up and ordered him to sit down.

He finally reluctantly obeyed.

"You sit there and coolly tell me that you know nothing of this woman," resumed Thad, looking him in the eye, "and yet after you left me last night you slipped out of the side door and went straight to her lodgings."

"How do you know?" inquired the young man, greatly surprised.

"I'll tell you how I know. After you had been in the flat a short time there was a tramp came to the door, wasn't there?"

"Yes, but—"

"The tramp," interrupted Thad, "wanted something to do, and you gave him a note to carry to your mother, or foster-mother, didn't you?"

"My God!" gasped the young man. "How in the name of wonder—"

"In that note you said something about somebody escaping from Blackwell's Island. This person you had told your wife (so she calls herself) was her brother who is confined there. When the tramp arrived at your house he was a little surprised to find your mother, who had been reported on the point of death, apparently as well as she had ever been. She wrote a reply to your letter, which was in cipher like your own, which read, 'Rescue at all hazards.' But that was not what it meant by any means. What it really did mean was that you should put the beautiful woman out of the way."

"That is not true, Mr. Burr! I swear—"

"No, don't swear. Because I happen to know that all I have told you is true. And you did try to kill the poor woman by drowning, and would have done so but for her own bravery."

CHAPTER XIII.

CORNERED.

DONALD JEROME was speechless at this declaration on the part of the detective.

He could not, of course, imagine where he had got hold of all this information, which he had supposed was only known to himself.

Finally, however, he appeared to receive a bright idea, for he looked up suddenly and his face brightened, as he said:

"Mr. Burr, you have been imposed upon. I know where you obtained your information."

"Do you?"

"Yes, and the fellow is not to be depended upon for an instant."

Thad affected to be amazed for the purpose of drawing the young man out.

"Is it possible?" said he.

"It is, and I can prove it to you. The fellow will lie any time when the truth would have served him better."

"You refer to the tramp, of course?"

Donald had not referred to him, but he caught at the hint, thinking that Thad had received all his information from him.

"Yes, he's the chap."

"I'm sorry to hear that," remarked the detective. "I was under the impression that he was a pretty truthful fellow."

"Then you do not know him as well as I do."

The young man was rapidly regaining his self-assurance.

"I ought to," smiled Thad. "I have been acquainted with him for about forty-five years."

Donald started.

"The deuce you have!" he ejaculated.

"That's what I have, and I have never known him to be guilty of a willful lie. But it was not he that told me about your rowing across to Blackwell's Island, around the island and off in the direction of the Long Island shore, where one of your men tried to throw the woman overboard."

"I know. It was Beardslee who told you that," smiled the young man, "and he is, if possible, a worse liar than Munson."

"Who is Munson?"

"The tramp who carried my letter."

"Oh, I was not aware he ever went under that name. I have known him to assume a good many names in cases of emergency, but never the name of Munson."

"What name did you know him under?"

"Thaddeus Burr."

"What?"

"That is the name he has always gone under, except, as I say, when it was expedient for him to assume another for the time being."

"I don't understand you, sir."

"Well, then, to make it plainer, I will tell you that the tramp to whom you gave the letter to carry to your mother and who brought back her answer, and to whom you gave a quarter, was no one but your humble servant in disguise."

The fellow's jaw dropped.

He could not utter a word.

"So," pursued the detective with a comical grin, "you see that I am inclined to doubt your word when you say that he is in the habit of stretching the truth. It may be as well to tell you, also, that it was I in the boat with the two river patrols who followed you and saw all your actions. I saw you when you were making for the Long Island shore, and heard the woman scream when your ruffian attempted to throw her overboard."

Still the fellow did not speak.

He stared at Thad as though he had been a miraculous being, and was unable to utter a word.

"But that is not all I have to say to you. I have learned that this woman whom you informed me yesterday was not your mother, is, in fact, your mother, and that you are not, as you claimed, the son of Banker Jerome. That you are impersonating a person who is dead, and that the papers in possession of old Mrs. James, which were destroyed, would have established this fact; that, therefore, you had a greater motive for destroying them than anybody else."

The young man groaned.

"This explains," continued the detective, "why your mother pretended to be ill and refused to see any one, and it also explains, in a measure, your motive for telling me that you had had a row with your mother. What have you to say to all this, sir?"

"Eh?"

The young man aroused himself, as out of a sleep.

"I say, perhaps you may be able to explain all this damning evidence away?"

"I can, sir," began Donald in a tremulous voice. "I can see that you have a great deal of circumstantial evidence against me, but I shall be able to prove the falsity of it all."

"I shall be delighted to have you do so."

"In the first place, what you say about the woman is partially true. I regret to say that when I told you that I did not know her I told you what was not true."

"It is not necessary to tell me that."

"My reason for that is, that I did not want any one, especially you, whom I have known so long, to know that I had ever had anything to do with this vile creature."

"Do you mean to say that you were not married to her?" interrupted Thad.

"I am not."

"Go on."

"That I wrote to my mother, or foster-mother, for I still maintain, and shall prove it, that she is not my mother—is true, as you know, but that the letter meant anything like what you think it did, and what the woman has doubtless told you, is not true. I was informed that her brother, who is confined on Blackwell's Island, had broken out of prison, and she persuaded me to go over and assist him to get ashore. When we got over to the island, the storm was so severe that we were compelled to abandon the project, and, as it was easier to reach the Long Island shore than the New York, we rowed in that direction. We saw the patrol boat following us, but had no idea that it was after us, and it was when we saw the boat capsize that Ida screamed. If she has told you differently she told you an untruth. She will not tell me so."

"But there is one discrepancy in your story, Donald."

"What is that?"

"When you left the New York shore there were but four of you, but when I last saw you before our boat capsized, there were five. Where did the fifth man come from?"

"From the island."

"Who was he, and what was he doing on the island?"

"He was a man we sent over to keep a look-out and tell us when we came in view whether the coast was clear or not. When we got over to the island he informed us that Ida's brother had not broken out, so far as he could learn, and so we took him aboard and started for the Long Island shore, as I said and you saw."

"You did not rescue the prisoner, then?"

"No, sir. As I said, the man was a person I had sent over to keep a look-out for the guards, and to inform us if young Bedloe had escaped or not."

"What did your mother know about this man?"

"Nothing more than what I had told her."

"Why did she want you to rescue him, then?"

"Because Ida had pleaded his case to my foster-mother, and she thought it the best thing to do."

"Did your mother know, before you wrote that cipher letter, that the young man had escaped?"

"No, but Ida had told her that he expected to."

"You had no thought of drowning her, then?"

"Certainly not. That is like her suspicious character. She is always imagining that I want to kill her."

"Did you not attempt it once?"

"Certainly not."

"How did you come to christen her the 'White Demon'?"

"She tried to kill me."

"What for?"

"Out of jealousy. She was jealous of another woman, and, taking advantage of me when I was asleep, tried to stab me. Here is the scar where she came very near doing the work," he went on, pointing to a scar on the right side of his throat. "When I woke up, as I providentially did, I was so overcome with disgust at discovering that she was such a fiend, I told her she was nothing short of demon—a white demon."

"She tells me that your right name is Edward Donaldson."

"That is the name she has known me by. You know a man never wants a woman of that character to know his right name."

"How do you explain the fact that your mother pretended to be ill when I went to the house last night in my true character, but when I went disguised as the tramp with a letter from you, she was as well as ever she was?"

"I do not pretend to explain that, Mr. Burr," faltered the young man. "When you know that woman as well as I do, you will wonder at no freak which she may be guilty of."

"What have you to say to the charge that you are not the real heir of Mr. Jerome, but the real son of this woman by another man, and that old Mrs. James was paid by you and your mother to pretend you were the heir?"

"Nothing, except to deny it on general principles."

"Did old Mrs. James ever make any such statement, so far as you know?"

"No, I am quite sure she never did."

"Did not Ida tell you that the old woman had told her so?"

"She never did. If she had I would not have believed it."

"Did you ever look over the documents in the possession of the old woman?"

"Some of them. She asked me to look over some of them for her, and see whether they were legal or not."

"What was the nature of them?"

"One was a deed of some property she had purchased."

"The Newtown property?"

"No, some other."

"What were the other documents?"

"Some transfers she had made, I do not remember what the exact nature of the others was."

"You saw nothing in the way of correspondence which established the fact that the real heir of Mr. Jerome was dead, eh?"

"I did not."

"Did the old woman ever quarrel with you for not giving her money enough?"

"Money enough?"

"Yes."

"No. I never gave her money, except as a present. She never expected any of me."

"Had you ever any disputes about anything?"

"Never. The old woman was very fond of me, and I of her, and so far as I remember, we never had a word. She always treated me as if I had been her own son, and I am sure I tried to treat her as though she had been my mother. No, it is nonsense to say that we ever had any quarrels."

"Did she not call at your flat—that is, the flat occupied by Ida—once, when you were absent?"

"She may have, but if she did, I do not know about it."

"Did not Ida tell you that the old woman had been there?"

"Not that I remember."

"Don't you remember that she told you the old woman had come there and remained a long time waiting for you, and then went away again, and afterward came back in a state of intoxication and berated you for not returning and giving her money?"

"Never."

"This is Ida's story."

"It is?"

"Yes."

"It is like her ingenuity."

"I should say it would require a good deal of ingenuity, if it is untrue."

"Well, it is untrue, every word of it."

"Then she is a remarkable woman. What can be her motive for manufacturing all this stuff against you?"

"God only knows. She has a tiff at me now. Perhaps to-morrow if you were to call upon her she would deny every word of it."

"Do you think it possible?"

"It would be in keeping with her character."

"Is she such a vicious person?"

"You have no idea what she is, sir. She is one of the most desperate women I ever encountered."

"How came you to get in with a woman of that kind?"

"Youth and folly, I presume. She is very pretty, as you doubtless noticed, and that probably had a great deal to do with it."

"She is certainly very much put out with you at present, and is outspoken in her belief that you were guilty of the murder of old Mrs. James."

This appeared to have a deeper effect on the young man than anything the detective had said yet.

He turned deathly pale and grew terribly nervous.

"Great Heavens!" he finally gasped, "did she say that?"

"Yes, and she claims to have proof of it."

"The white demon! What can she mean by all this?"

"I have no idea, unless she really has the proof."

"But you surely do not believe that of me, Mr. Burr?" pleaded the young lawyer. "You certainly do not believe me capable of such a thing?"

"It would grieve me exceedingly to think so, Donald," returned Thad sympathetically.

"But do you?" he persisted.

"All I can say is that the evidence points unpleasantly direct in your direction, my boy."

"But you said the evidence was very strong against Francis."

"So it is, and between you, I am in a quandary which way to turn to be in the right. The circumstantial evidence appears to be very strong against him, to be sure, but he has the advantage of never having allowed me to catch him in an untruth or to be mixed up in any shady business. If anybody had hinted two days ago that you could have been capable of such a thing as I saw last night I should not have believed it. But that has had the effect of destroying my faith in you somewhat, and then you have told me several untruths since this interview began, which I cannot easily get over."

"Well," said Donald, rising. "It can grieve you no more, Mr. Burr, to have lost faith in me than it does me to think that you have been compelled to. But this is certain, I am innocent, and I shall have the pleasure

of proving it to you before many days, I hope and trust."

"You will be no happier in such an event than I, my boy," said Burr warmly. "I would rather than all the wealth that you will inherit if you prove your case, that I could feel this moment that you are an innocent man."

Donald hung his head and walked slowly out of the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRESH COMPLICATIONS.

It was late in the afternoon when Donald Jerome left the detective, and as soon as he had dinner he dressed himself, and called upon Francis Jerome, whom he was fortunate enough to find at home.

"Well," was the young man's first question. "Have you brought that warrant for my arrest?"

"Not yet," returned Thad laughing. "I do not know how soon I may, though."

"Why delay?"

"I want to secure a little more evidence."

"Oh, that is the trouble, eh? Well, can I be of any service to you in that direction?"

"I'm afraid not. You do not seem able to recollect the exact time at which you committed the crime."

"That is the deuce of getting drunk. By George, I'll have to give it up. You see if I had been sober, I could have given you all the details, and you might have had me hanged before now."

Thad could not help but compare the coolness, not to say the appearance of innocence of this man with the nervousness and apparent effort to avoid suspicion, of the other one, and his mind was almost made up, in spite of the strong chain of circumstantial evidence against him.

"That is true, but the way things look now it appears as if we might be disappointed in our hope of hanging you."

"That's sad—truly sad. What did my friend Montague say?"

"Why, he was as much in the woods as yourself. He says you strayed away and left him about five o'clock and did not show up again till about half past nine, or something of that kind. But his evidence as to your appearance when you did return is rather favorable to our scheme."

"Of hanging me?"

"Yes."

"How was that?"

"He says you were covered with blood, and were wet from being out in the rain."

"That sounds encouraging."

"Did you notice anything about your clothes?"

"I noticed that they were wet, but there was no blood. It maybe, though, that some of the boys had me cleaned up before allowing me to go home."

"That is possible. But you wouldn't mind letting me see the suit you had on, I suppose?"

"Certainly not, if you think it will help you along any."

"It may."

He arose, in his usual languid manner, and went away.

In the course of twenty minutes or so he returned with a suit of clothes which certainly had the appearance of having been out in the wet, but there was no sign of blood on them.

After examining them thoroughly, an idea occurred to the detective, and he asked:

"Might I look at the shirt? That would not have been so easily cleaned."

Francis shook his head dismally.

"Unfortunately, that has been laundered, my friend," he said.

"And no blood-stains appear?"

"Not a stain."

"Did you notice any before you sent it to the laundry?"

"I am sorry to say that I did not."

"This is, indeed, sad," laughed Thad, entering into the spirit of his drollery. "I had hoped to find some damning evidence in the appearance of these clothes."

Francis looked very serious.

"If you had only told me in time," he murmured, "I should have had the matter all fixed up."

Thad was silent.

He was puzzled to understand how all this circumstantial evidence had so strangely wound itself about this young man, who had all the appearance of being the most innocent of men, and for the life of him he could not find it in his heart to believe him anything else.

He decided to drop the subject of the tragedy.

"You had a call from your brother yesterday, I believe?" he began.

"Yesterday evening," he admitted.

"What did you think of him?"

"He appears to be an intelligent young gentleman, but hardly the person I could believe the son of my father."

"Why?"

"There is a want of sympathy and frankness about him which are among the strongest characteristics of my father, and, if I do say it, are said to be dominant in myself to some extent."

"I have noticed it. I have also noticed the characteristic you speak of in the other man. Well, it may turn out that he is not your father's son, after all."

"Eh?"

The young man showed more enthusiasm than Thad had hitherto noticed in him.

"There is now some evidence that the real heir died while yet very young, and that this fellow is an impostor."

"You don't tell me!"

"The evidence is not very clear yet, but I propose to sift the matter to the bottom and find what there is in it. It seems that among the documents which were in the hands of the old woman who was assassinated, there were some papers which, if they had not been destroyed, would have proven this fact."

"It is unfortunate for me that they were destroyed, then."

"Yes, and that was the first thing that led me to believe that there was some mistake about your being the guilty party. If we can prove this, it will do away with the motive."

"But who could have had a motive for destroying the papers, think you?"

"No one so much as your alleged brother. If any such papers can be found, away goes his claim to the name and title which you now bear."

"But the letters?"

"They will go for nothing, in the face of such evidence."

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, these letters only prove that the real heir was the son of your father's first wife, but if we can prove that that heir is dead, don't you see this fellow will stand in the light of an impostor?"

"So he will, but how are we to prove this?"

"That I cannot answer just yet, but I shall make every effort to discover the truth."

"Which, when discovered, will prove him to be the real heir and me the murderer. It wouldn't be my characteristic luck otherwise. But seriously, I do not see how we are to prove anything if those documents have all been destroyed."

"My hope," said the detective thoughtfully, "is that the very document we want may not have been destroyed."

"I am afraid that is a vain hope. This fellow, as I can see, is no fool, and, if he had anything to do with the matter, rest assured he did not stop at any half-way methods, and didn't allow the very document which should above all others have been destroyed, to escape him."

"Did you have any talk with him about the assassination when he was here?"

"Yes, we spoke some about it."

"How did he act when speaking of it?"

"It did not occur to me that he acted like a man who was guilty at all. But then I had no thought of his being guilty, and therefore would not have noticed it if he had acted ever so suspiciously."

Thad reflected a moment or two, and again took occasion to study the young man, both from his conduct and his appearance.

And again he was forced more than ever to the conviction that he must be innocent.

For this reason he determined to take him into his confidence, and in that way have an opportunity of studying him more thoroughly.

"I am going out to Newtown to-morrow," he began, "to have another look for any documents which may have been overlooked by the murderer of Mrs. James. Would you like to accompany me, Mr. Jerome?"

"Nothing would suit me better. What time shall you go?"

"As early in the morning as possible."

"Very well, say ten o'clock."

"That will do. Will you come to my place, or shall I come here for you?"

"I will come to your place. It will be more in our way, and, if agreeable to you, I will drive down in the buggy and we'll go over in that way."

"That will be agreeable, if the weather is fine."

"All right, then, if the weather is favorable, I'll be there at ten. By the way, you haven't told me where you live."

Burr gave him the number, and soon afterward took his leave.

It was exactly ten o'clock when the detective left the house, and, as the weather was fine, he concluded to walk a piece down Fifth avenue.

Young Jerome had accompanied him to the door, and the two men stood talking for a few moments. Thad imagined he had seen a shadow flit down the steps and disappear behind the masonry of the stoop.

Without alluding to the incident to his young friend, he leaned over and looked down, but in the darkness that prevailed below he could discern nothing.

He thought he might be mistaken at the moment, but as he started to walk away he instinctively cast his eye back toward the stoop.

As he did so he saw a figure move out of the shadow, dart across to the opposite side of the street and again disappear in the shadow of the stone wall inclosing the Park.

The detective's suspicions were thoroughly aroused by this incident, but he determined to pretend that he had not noticed it, and walked on as indifferently as if nothing had happened.

He kept his eyes and ears open, however, and was soon rewarded first by the sound of stealthy footsteps on the opposite side of the road, and later by a glimpse of a figure which was evidently keeping him in view.

Still he affected not to notice the occurrence, and strode on, even going to the length of whistling by way of showing his carelessness.

This continued for some time, and the detective began to wonder what the outcome would be, as if the person had any evil designs, he was momentarily sacrificing his opportunities for action as he neared the lower part of the Park and came closer to the thickly populated part of the city.

Nevertheless, the fellow appeared in no hurry, and kept right on on the opposite side of the road, and about even with the detective.

Fifty-ninth was at length reached.

This is the lower end of the Park, and three of the largest hotels in the city render this part of the town particularly lively at this hour of the night.

The place is ablaze with light and the streets are thronged with pedestrians and vehicles.

Here Thad hurried on and was soon lost in the crowd, but he kept a keen watch on the opposite side of the street, and presently he saw a ruffian-looking fellow slouch across the street diagonally toward the New Netherlands Hotel.

The fellow glanced in every direction, as if looking for some one, and Thad was sure that this was his shadower.

"He will be keener than I think he is," mused the detective, "if he picks me out in this crowd."

Still, he took no pains to conceal himself, and was rather anxious than otherwise to see if the fellow would recognize him if he saw him.

Burr stopped in front of the hotel and waited for the fellow to come up, which he soon did, slouching along, scanning every face with the minutest interest.

At length he came opposite the detective and their eyes met.

There was no question now about the re-

cognition, or the fact that the fellow had been shadowing Thad.

The moment he caught Burr's eye, the fellow started, dodged away and soon became lost in the crowd.

Thad was both puzzled and amused.

He was puzzled to know who the fellow was and what he was up to, and he was amused to see the way he eluded him when he found the object of his search.

After watching for some time for the mysterious shadower, Burr hailed a passing stage and got in.

Still he kept a watch for his man, but saw nothing of him, and in the tumult of other reflections, the fellow passed out of his mind entirely.

Thad left the stage at Thirty-fourth street, intending to walk across town to his home, but he had gone but a little way when he became aware that his shadower was on his scent again.

The fellow had grown more bold now, and kept the same side of the street.

Burr allowed the thing to go on till he was near Seventh avenue, where it was very dark, when he suddenly turned about and, before his shadower was aware of his intention, met him face to face.

Again the fellow tried to elude him, but Thad would not have it that way.

Heading him off as he was about to slip by him, he demanded:

"Well, sir, what do you mean by following me wherever I go?"

"Who's follerin' yer?" growled the fellow, insolently.

"You are," roared the detective, "and if there is any more of it I shall call an officer and have you arrested!"

"I ain't bin followin' yer," growled the fellow. "'Cause a feller happens ter be goin' yer way, thet's no sign he's a follerin' yer."

"It was by no accident that you followed me from Seventy-second street and Fifth avenue. Besides, you betrayed yourself when you crossed the street at Fifty-ninth, looking for me. Now skip out, or I shall run you in!"

The fellow, who the detective now noticed was a villainous looking wretch, slunk away without another word, and made off in the direction of Broadway.

Thad was far from satisfied, however, and, pretending to walk on, soon afterward cut across the street and concealed himself in the shadow of a church.

Here he waited for some time, and at length he was surprised to see the shadower steal out of a side street, having evidently gone around the block to avoid suspicion, and put off in the direction of Ninth avenue, the course he would have to go in order to reach home.

Waiting till he was pretty well past, Thad stole out and walked on in the direction of his own house.

Keeping the fellow in sight, he saw him looking in every direction, evidently for the detective, and at length come up to the latter's house.

Here he stopped and gazed at the house for some time as if he was debating with himself whether to approach it or not. But he appeared to finally abandon the project, and walked on for some distance till he reached the house of Mrs. Jerome.

Here he did not hesitate a moment, but approached the door and rung the bell. A moment later the door was opened to him and, without the least ceremony, he was admitted.

CHAPTER XV.

MORE MYSTERY.

Burr was more than ever convinced by this mysterious affair that Donald was mixed up in some shady business, but whether it had anything to do with the late murder or not, he was at a loss to know.

The tramp whom he had seen enter the house had evidently been commissioned to shadow him.

There could be no doubt of this.

What puzzled the detective was how Donald or his mother had discovered that he was going to visit Francis that evening.

That they were aware of it, however, was evidenced by the fact of their having this fellow shadow him.

But what had they gained, or could they have hoped to gain, by the transaction?

It would have served their ends quite as well to have had some one stationed in front of the house to see whether he entered or not, so what had been the motive for keeping him in view the entire distance from the Jerome residence to his home?

At this point a grave suspicion flitted through his mind.

Had not the motive been something more serious than the mere discovery that he had visited the place?

Thad trembled slightly at the thought that their object had probably been to put him out of the way, as they knew that he stood in the way of Donald's success in the scheme with his supposed father.

As he ruminated thus, he kept a close watch on his neighbor's house for the reappearance of the tramp.

In order to be more secure from detection when the fellow should put in an appearance, the detective took the double precaution of slipping on a false beard of gray hair and walking over to the opposite side of the street.

Presently the door opened and, not only the ruffian, but Donald also, came out.

They walked leisurely along toward Thad's house, apparently engaged in conversation.

When in front of the door they paused and to Burr's astonishment Donald walked up to the door and rung the bell.

The detective from the opposite side of the road watched the maneuver.

The door was promptly opened and Thad could see his servant in conversation with the young man.

At length the door closed and Donald returned to the sidewalk where he had left the ruffian.

Thad was curious to know what their scheme was, but decided to await further maneuvering.

The men stood talking for some time, occasionally pointing in the direction of Ninth avenue from which they apparently expected the detective would soon come.

Finally, however, they appeared to become tired of waiting, and both men walked on toward Ninth avenue.

As soon as they had proceeded a short distance Thad crossed over and started after them.

The pair walked on, still conversing, and continually looking about with the evident hope of espying their man.

Ninth avenue was passed, and still they kept on, apparently in no hurry, for they walked at a very moderate pace, and finally reached Eighth avenue.

Here they stopped and looked in every direction and their conversation waxed more animated, and Thad, who had ventured within earshot of them, ascertained that the young man was berating the tramp for his stupidity in allowing their man to escape.

"Yer couldn't help it," he heard the tramp mutter. "He turned onter me, an' would 'a' run me in, if I hedn't heeled it."

"Just like your infernal cowardice," growled Donald. "All that was necessary was a little bluff. If you had told him to go on and have you arrested, he would have turned around to look for a cop, and that would have been your chance. But what I wonder at is your stupidity in not doing your work while you had him up-town. There it could have been done with perfect security."

"Not so easy ez yer might think. Yer see—"

But here the conversation was interrupted by a crowd of people coming from the opposite direction, and the two men either became silent or their voices were drowned by the babel of the crowd.

They increased their pace, however, and Thad had to increase his to keep up with them.

Seventh avenue was reached and passed, and the men appeared to have no other end in view now than reaching their destination, wherever that was, and the detective was not long in the dark with regard to the matter, for a few moments later they entered the flat-house where dwelt the White Demon.

The detective could hardly believe his eyes.

After what he had heard the woman say

of him and he of her, how was it possible that they were to meet?

"However," he mused, shaking his head dolefully, "it is only consistent with the lot of them. Two days ago I could not have believed that either Donald or his mother could be capable of deceit, and now I know them both to be the worst kind of deceptionists. But I had formed a better opinion of the little woman, in spite of what Donald said about her."

As the detective mused he examined the row of names over the bells, and just as he came to the last one in the row, which was that of the dweller on the top floor, the door opened and a little girl came out.

She stared curiously, half-frightened, at the old man with the long white beard, but he smiled at her, and by way of reassuring her, gave her a nickel, and then asked her what floor the McKeevers lived on, that being the name on the card he had last read.

"On the top floor," replied the little girl, and left the door, which she was about to close, open for the old man to enter.

"Thank you, my little dear," said the detective, imitating the voice and manner of an old man.

He then entered the door and closing it after him, proceeded to ascend the stairs.

He had no definite plan in view in going up-stairs.

He knew that he could not gain access to the flat, but an anxiety to get as close to the people he sought as possible caused him to push on.

When he reached the third floor, the one on which Ida's flat was situated, he was gratified to find the door of the private hall open.

This private hall, so called, served the purpose for two flats, which it separated, and was no more the private property of one than the other.

The flat on the left was Ida's, the one on the right some one else's.

Ida's flat was lighted up, but the other was in darkness.

"What if it should be vacant?" mused he. And he slipped into the hall.

At the further end of the hall a light shone from the little parlor of the White Demon.

The other side was dark.

Thad stole stealthily along till he reached the end of the hall.

He could hear talking in the parlor of Ida. All was quiet on the other side.

Putting his ear to the key-hole, he listened.

"I am done with you!" he heard.

It was Ida's voice.

The softness and melody which he had noticed and admired, were no longer there, and the voice was shrill and strident.

"But you are so unreasonable," pleaded another voice.

It was that of Donald.

The tone of the voice showed nothing but humility.

"Perhaps I am," she replied. "But if I am, you have driven me to it. I have listened to your lies and been deceived by you long enough. I say I am done."

"But the thing will soon be accomplished now," he pleaded, "and we can snap our fingers at the whole lot of them."

"That is what you have been promising for a long time, but nothing has come out of it. If I hadn't been a little too brave for you last night, you would have ended my career in a different way."

"Ida, my love, why do you persist in saying that it was any doing of mine. Here is Dolph, who will tell you that it was he alone who projected the thing and attempted to carry it out without one word from me."

"That's so," growled the hoarse voice which Thad recognized as that of the tramp.

"It was me as done it all, mum."

There was a brief silence, followed by a quick movement of feet and the sharp rustle of skirts, and the next instant the detective heard a suspicious clicking which sounded very much like the cocking of a revolver, and then the cold, incisive words:

"It was you, was it?"

This was followed by a groan, and then the pitiful voice of the tramp in supplication:

"Please, Miss Ida, don't kill me!"

"It was you, was it?" she repeated in the same icy tones.

"Please, Miss Ida, don't kill me!"

"It was you, was it?" she repeated in the same icy tones.

"Please, Miss Ida, don't kill me!"

"It was you, was it?" she repeated in the same icy tones.

"Mercy! Mercy!" implored the stifled voice of the tramp. "I'll swear—"

"What will you swear?" cried the woman in a calm voice. "Out with it!"

"Oh! for God's sake spare my life!"

"Why should I? You admit that you were about to take mine. It was not out of mercy that you spared my life, but because you were too much of a coward to take it. Now you shall pay the penalty!"

"Stop! For God's sake! Stop, and I'll tell yer the truth of ther hull business."

"Quick, then! Out with it. Was it your idea or his?"

A slight silence ensued, and the woman repeated her demand:

"Was it you or he?"

"Spare me, miss!" implored the wretch.

"It wasn't me."

"It wasn't you?"

"No, mum, I'll swear it!"

"Who was it, then?"

Another silence followed, and Thad could hear the sound of hard breathing, as of some one being choked.

Finally there came a peculiar gurgling sound, quickly followed by the voice of the ruffian:

"I'll tell ye all, mum, only don't choke me like thet again, or I won't hev the breath."

"Speak, then, and be quick about it!"

"It was him," came the faltering voice of the tramp. "Now!"

"You lie! You villain!" came the furious voice of Donald. "Repeat that, and you are a dead man!"

"Hold!" cried the woman. "Don't you dare to touch him! He has spoken nothing but the truth. I am satisfied of that. Now, what have you to say, sir?"

"What I said before," faltered Donald, in a modified tone. "He lies! I had nothing to do with the affair."

"You would not dare to say that to a man!" she hissed. "It is only because you know him to be the arrant coward he is, that you dare call him a liar, or even dispute his word to his face. Nevertheless, if you denied it a thousand times, Edward Donaldson, I should not believe you. What motive could this poor miserable wretch have for wishing to put me out of the way?"

There was no response to this demand, and she pursued:

"You, and you alone, were the one to concoct the scheme to put me out of the way. You thought I knew too much, and was afraid that I would not play the part of accomplice in your miserable schemes, and you thought to make an end of me. But, you poor cowardly puppy! you hadn't the courage to do it yourself, and then when your wretched tool here failed, you try to put the blame on him, and even went to the length of bribing him to confess to a crime of which he was never guilty. Who are you going to put that other crime on to?"

"What is that, Ida?" muttered the young man, timidly.

"You know well enough to what I refer. The murder of old Mrs. James!"

"I had nothing to do with that, and you know it, Ida," he asserted with more energy than he had hitherto exhibited. "That was that miserable half-brother of mine."

The woman laughed.

"That miserable half-brother, indeed!" she sneered. "You would like to lay it at his door, wouldn't you?"

"The evidence is all against him. Ask the detective."

"The detective will say nothing of the kind. Besides, it sounds well for you to call him your half-brother, to me, who know that he is no more your half-brother than I am."

"But he is, as the letters prove."

"A fig for the letters!" she sneered.

"There is something which will down the letters too quickly."

"What is it?" he gasped.

"The papers of the old woman."

"They are all destroyed."

"How well you know," she laughed. "You imagined that you had destroyed them all, didn't you?"

"I tell you I had nothing to do with it, Ida. I swear it. But the detective, who was out there and examined the premises, told me that all the old woman's papers were destroyed—burned up."

Again she indulged in her wicked laugh. "Well, I do not know whether it was you or not," she said, more seriously. "I believe, and always shall believe that you killed the old woman, but whether you did or not, there is one thing certain."

"What is that?"

"Whoever it was failed in one thing."

"What?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"He failed to destroy all the papers."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I know, and that is sufficient. And the very papers he failed to destroy are the ones he should have destroyed, if he was a friend of yours."

"Why so?" he questioned, breathlessly.

"Because they are the very ones which prove that the real heir of the old man Jerome died when he was twelve years old."

The young man groaned.

"What are you giving me, Ida?" he finally gasped. "Is this really true, or are you fooling me?"

"You will find out how true it is, before you are very much older, my friend."

"How came you to know about these papers, my dear?" he pleaded, growing affectionate.

"Oh, you needn't try to honey around me now, my fine fellow," she said, tauntingly. "You will never find out in that way, or any other, I warn you now."

"But you will at least tell me where they are?"

"That would be worse still."

"Look here, Ida, we have been a good deal to each other, why can we not still be friends?"

"I be a friend to you again? Hardly!" she sneered. "There was a time when I was that big a fool, but that time has passed."

"Look here, Ida," he implored, "if you will tell me where these papers are and help me gain my point with the old man—"

"What will you do?" she interposed.

"I will marry you, and make you the greatest lady in the city!"

Her only response was a repetition of her heartless laugh.

CHAPTER XVI.

PLAYING A DOUBLE ROLE.

THAD was more unsettled now than ever. He had been so positive about the guilt of Donald, that he had ceased to question it, but now, since his denial to the woman, he was a little doubtful again.

Because if he had been actually guilty, it seemed as if he would have had little hesitancy about telling her, who, from what the detective could make out, was as depraved as himself.

But the fact that the young man was not the real heir, and that he was aware of it, seemed to be substantiated by his proposition to marry this woman.

Would he have risked so much if he had been the real heir instead of an impostor?

Certainly a man in the position in which this would place him would not want to be tied to a woman of her stamp.

While these reflections were running through the detective's brain he was waiting and listening with all his undivided attention for Ida's answer.

She took a good while about deciding, it appeared, and found a good deal to laugh about, but she finally sobered down and asked:

"So you would marry me would you?"

"Yes."

"And take me to live in a fine house in Fifth avenue?"

"Certainly, my dear," he replied, encouraged by her apparent inclination to yield.

"And introduce me to all your aristocratic friends and your high-toned family?"

"Of course, my precious, I would do all that."

"And we would all go abroad, and I would there be introduced to the nobility?"

"Yes."

"And you would never grow tired of me, or reflect upon what I had been in the past?"

"Never."

"And I would be your really and truly little loving wife, would I?"

"Certainly, my love."

"You are sure you would never get tired of me or abuse me or call me the white demon again, are you?"

"Absolutely certain."

She broke forth in that wild laugh again.

"And all I would have to do to gain all this would be to tell you where these papers are, eh?"

"That is all, my dear."

"How anxious you must be to get them."

"Why shouldn't I be? Everything depends upon them."

"But the letters?"

"Are worthless if, as you say, there are documents proving that the real heir is dead and that I am not he."

"But if there are such papers, and when you get them you find that what I say is true, that you are not the heir, you would still be willing to play the part and reap the benefit of it, eh?"

"Why not? I would still have as much right to it as the man who now occupies the position."

"But suppose after you got exalted to that high position the truth should be found out, and you would be thrown down again?"

"There is not much danger of that, if I get my hands upon those papers."

"But suppose such a thing should happen?"

"Well, in such a case, I would have to take it philosophically and make the best of it, I suppose."

"And I would have to do the same, I suppose?"

"Yes, my dear, we would have to share each other's misfortunes as well as prosperity."

She was silent a moment and appeared to be reflecting upon her choice.

At length she said:

"And do you think I would want to run the risk of being humiliated in that way?"

"It would be no worse for you than for me. Come, what do you say?"

"I am well enough off where I am, and don't think I want to take the risk."

"Your position would be no more risky there than here, my dear," he pleaded.

"Perhaps not, but here I am independent, and there I would not be."

"Yes you would, my dear, more so. You would be absolute mistress of your house and all the servants."

"Ah, dear," she sighed. "It's a very bright picture. But how am I to know that you will keep your word? Perhaps when you get your fortune and position you will change your mind."

"Never."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you will marry me first, I'll go you."

This was a poser.

The fellow was silent.

He had evidently not expected anything of the kind.

"That is hardly fair," he finally said.

"Why not?"

"It might interfere with my affairs."

"How could it?"

"I do not know, but it might. And again you might conclude to change your mind about giving me the papers."

"If you cannot trust me, how can you expect me to trust you, my fine fellow?" she laughed.

"How do I know that you have these papers at all?" he finally muttered.

"You only have my word for it," she laughed.

Donald appeared to be perplexed.

"Come," he said at length, "let me have the papers, and as soon as I examine them and find them all right I'll lead you to the altar, my love."

"Marriage first," she persisted.

"You are very unreasonable."

"Perhaps."

"See here."

"Well?"

"I have a proposition for you."

"What is it?"

"Bring out your papers, and I give you my word that I will not take them from this room. You shall still keep them, and I will not ask you to give them to me for good until after I have married you. Is it a go?"

"I could not do that any way, for the papers are not here."

"Where are they?"

"That is a leading question."

"How long will it take you to get them?"

"Not long after you have made me your lawful wife."

"Could you get them to-night?"

"I might."

"Well, go fetch them. I will remain here, and as soon as I find that they are what you claim, I will let Dolph here go for a minister. What say you?"

"No, not to-night. I must sleep on the proposition. Come to-morrow, and I will give you my answer."

"Why not to-night?"

"It would take me too long to get the papers. See, it is after midnight now, and it would take me at least three hours to get the papers and get back here."

"They are a long way off, then?"

"They may or may not be. That is my business, but it will take me a good while to get them, nevertheless."

The young man reflected a long time, and finally arose.

"Very well, then," he said. "Let it be to-morrow. What time shall I call?"

"Oh, in the afternoon some time. Don't come too early."

"Say in the evening, then?"

"That will be better. About eight o'clock."

"All right. I shall be here."

"If the police don't get you before that time," laughed she.

"No danger of that," he growled, not relishing the joke.

"Well, good-night, darling," she said, tauntingly.

"Good-night, Ida," he responded, rather coldly. "Come, Dolph."

Thad had merely time to compress himself into the recess of the opposite doorway when the door of the flat opened and the two men came forth.

Happily they did not notice him and passed out.

He had no curiosity about following them any further, so quickly removing his gray beard, the detective knocked at the door from which the two men had just emerged.

The door was promptly opened, by the lady herself this time, and she was more than surprised to see him, but by no means displeased.

"Why, good-evening, Mr. Robinson," she cried. "I am delighted to see you. But what brings you around here at such an hour?"

"Oh, I'm a night owl, you know," rejoined the detective. "I am around at all times of the night."

"Well, come in," she said, good-naturedly, and he could not help noticing the difference in the tone of her voice from that employed when speaking to Donald.

Thad stepped in, and as soon as the door was closed behind him, she looked him straight in the eye, smiled and said:

"There is something in the wind, or you would not be around at this time of night. Now, am I right?"

"There is always something in the wind, when there is a wind," laughed he.

"But there is something out of the common this time. Did you meet Ned coming up?"

"No, I met him coming down."

"How funny. I mean when you were coming up."

"Yes."

"It's a wonder he allowed you to come up without coming with you," she said.

"Why, is he so jealous as that?"

"Not that, exactly, but he would be afraid we would say something that he wouldn't hear."

"Well, perhaps he wouldn't have allowed me to pass unchallenged if he had seen me."

"He didn't see you, then?"

"No."

"How was that?"

"Oh, I have a way of traveling in an invisible cloak once in a while."

"I half believe you do. You seem to know everybody's business, and nobody knows how you obtain the information. Ned has just been accusing me to-night of telling you things which I knew nothing about in the wide world."

"He imagines that I must have things told me in order to know them the same as

other people. By the way, when is the wedding coming off?"

She opened her eyes to their full capacity and stared at him as though they would burst from their sockets.

How in the name of all that is devilish did you know anything about that already?"

"Didn't I tell you that it wasn't necessary for me to have people tell me things in order that I might know them?"

"I know you did but I should like to know how you got hold of this."

"I might tell you if you tell me when the wedding is coming off," laughed he.

"Well, it won't take me long to tell you that."

"Well?"

"Never."

"What?"

"That is what I said."

"But you do not mean it?"

"I do."

"How is that?"

"Do you imagine I would marry him? Suppose he did get his fortune and his big name, how long would it be before he would make an excuse to get rid of me?"

"You are sensible about that. But you are going to show him the papers, aren't you?"

"For heaven's sake! Is there anything you don't know?"

"Yes, a few things, but I'm trying to learn them as fast as possible."

"I don't think there is much for you to learn."

"But you haven't told me about the papers. Are you going to show them to him?"

"Perhaps."

"You have the papers, then?"

"Not exactly."

"But you know where they are?"

"Maybe I do."

"Why do you propose to show them to him, if you do not propose to marry him?"

"If I do show them to him—there is nothing certain as to whether I will or not—but if I do, it will only be to convince him that he has no right to the position and name to which he aspires."

"But do you not know that if he gets his hands on them he will destroy them, as he did the others?"

"If I should give an opportunity, I know he would, only too quick, but I shall not give him the opportunity."

"You had better not risk allowing him to see them."

"I do not fear him. He would not dare attempt to destroy them in my presence, and he shall not take them out of my sight."

"I see that he denies having anything to do with the Newtown murder. What do you think now?"

"Oh, you know about that, too, do you?"

"Certainly. But what do you think about it?"

"I haven't changed my mind in the least. I'm as positive that he did it as I am that I exist."

"Is that the reason you refuse to marry him?"

"That is one reason, but not the only one."

"If that were the only objection, should it stand in the way?"

"What a question."

"But seriously?"

"I had hoped that you had a better opinion of me than to ask the question. Of course I would not marry a murderer. I am no angel, but I am not quite so bad as that, if he does choose to call me the White Demon."

"It does you great credit," observed the detective warmly, "and I respect you for it."

"I am very proud to have your respect, sir, I can tell you, and I shall try to deserve it."

"Well, I will leave you, Miss Ida. Take good care that he does not get hold of the papers."

"Trust me for that," she laughed.

CHAPTER XVII.

A HUNT FOR THE PAPERS.

WHEN Thad left the woman's flat he looked about for the two men, but they had disappeared, and he went home.

The following morning he was divided as to what course to take first.

He expected Francis Jerome along about ten o'clock, and he believed that Ida would be off at an early hour in search of the papers.

Upon the whole, he did not know what to make of the woman after all.

She had promised to marry, or rather insisted upon Donald marrying her, and he did not believe a woman of her class would hesitate to marry a young man of his prospects, besides he could not help contrasting her manner of speaking to Donald and about him behind his back.

The question was could he trust her?

After all she might be playing a double role for the purpose of throwing him (the detective) off the track.

At any rate he thought it would do no harm to watch her.

So leaving word with his wife to tell Francis Jerome to drive to the corner of Seventh avenue and Thirty-fourth street for him, in case he came with his buggy, he disguised himself by the addition of a brown, pointed beard, and went to the flat-house where Ida's flat was, and posted himself in a position where he could watch the door and the corner of the street at the same time.

Ten o'clock came, and soon after the buggy appeared at the corner of the street.

Thad hurried away to meet his young friend, and, when he had succeeded in making himself known to him, had him drive a few doors past the house and wait.

Having done so, the detective again took up his stand and proceeded to watch the door once more.

But it was a long and tedious watch.

In fact, it was nearly noon before any thing occurred to vary the monotony; then all of a sudden the woman put in an appearance.

She hurried out of the door and started in the direction of Broadway.

As soon as she was a little way off Thad hastened to the buggy, and, pointing her out to the young man, said:

"That is our game. Let us keep her in sight."

With that he climbed into the buggy.

Francis, who understood nothing of the affair, was bewildered.

"What has she got to do with our business?" he questioned, curiously. "I thought we were going in search of the papers."

"So we are, and so is that woman, if I am not very much mistaken, and our easiest plan is to watch her. If you want to find where a dog has hidden his bone you want to watch the dog."

He then related what he had learned respecting the papers, and concluded by expressing the opinion that the woman was then on her way to get the documents.

"But she certainly does not intend to go to Newtown afoot?" objected Francis.

"I presume not, but we must watch her and see where she goes. She may not intend to go there at all. It may not be necessary for her to go there."

"You think it possible that she may have them in the city, then, do you?"

"It is possible. At any rate, if they are still in the country, she will probably take a cross town car pretty soon and ride as far as the ferry, take the ferry across the river, and there take the train for Newtown."

"In which case she will get there first and give us the slip."

"That depends upon whether she is lucky enough to catch a train as soon as she gets across the river. If she has to wait a few minutes, and we are satisfied she intends going there, we can drive on and gain time. In that way we may reach the village as soon as she does."

"You are right. But see! She evidently intends footing it, as she has allowed two cars to pass her, and is still walking."

"Perhaps she thinks a walk will do her good."

But the woman did not intend to walk the whole distance. Neither did she propose taking a street-car, for the words of the young man were scarcely out of his mouth before they saw her hail a closed carriage, enter it and was driven away.

"She evidently intends to have as much secrecy about this transaction as possible," commented Francis.

"It is a little strange that she should take a closed carriage to drive no further than the ferry," rejoined the detective, who was as much puzzled at the strange action as the young man.

"There is something crooked about that woman, I am willing to bet," observed Francis.

"There is not the least doubt about that," smiled Thad. "She is about as crooked as they make them. There is no better proof of this than the fact that Donald calls her the White Demon."

"He knows her, then?"

"Rather."

"His friend, probably?"

"She evidently was once, but whether she now is in with him is a question for the sages. She sometimes talks as if she were, and at other times she would lead you to believe that she would like to see him hanged, drawn and quartered."

"All for a purpose, mark my words."

"I fear that there is something of the kind. I have been more perplexed to make her out than any individual I ever met. Last night I heard her make him promise to marry her, and then, five minutes afterward she protested to me that she would not marry him under any consideration."

"They're a pair, mark my words," drawled Francis, "and working together for a grand project."

"You may be right; and yet, she was the first to put me in the way of finding these letters. Indeed, I had no idea that such papers existed until she told me about them."

"That was a queer give-away, to be sure; but, after all, it may be a part of the artful game."

Burr was about to answer when something occurred to cause him to remain silent and hold his breath.

The carriage had reached Third avenue, and, just as he was about to speak, it stopped, and, to the wonder and astonishment of the detective and his young companion, a man walked out from the sidewalk and entered the carriage!

The man was Donald Jerome!

Neither man was able to speak until the carriage resumed its course, when Francis almost gasped:

"Well, I'll be hanged! What do you think now?"

"I'm floored," replied the detective. "I could not have believed it if I hadn't seen it."

"You'll find it is just as I said," muttered the other.

"I am willing to believe it, or anything now."

Meanwhile the carriage rolled on, and soon reached the ferry-house at the foot of Thirty-fourth street and East River.

The party did not leave the carriage, and when the boat arrived, drove on.

"Now we are in for it," remarked Francis.

"How is that?"

"We shall have to drive on with them and the chances are that we will be jammed alongside of them, and in that case Donald will recognize me."

"We'll soon arrange that," smiled Thad, taking a false beard from his pocket and handing it to the young man. "Put that on, and your best friend won't recognize you."

Francis took the disguise and examined it curiously.

"How do you fix the blamed thing?" he questioned. "I am not used to this sort of thing."

"I perceive you aren't," laughed Thad, arranging the beard for him.

Fortunately they had stopped where there were no other vehicles, and the few pedestrians at this time of day paid no attention to them, so that the detective soon had his friend fixed out with a pointed beard similar to his own.

"I must be a sight with this on," he commented.

"You look all right," rejoined Thad reassuringly. "But let us get on the boat or we shall be left."

Francis drove on the boat, and, as he had predicted, they were jammed very closely on to the carriage.

The blinds were drawn on that side so that they could not look into the carriage,

but the occupants could have looked out and seen them if they had been inclined to.

"I wonder if they intend going all the way in that carriage," mused young Jerome.

"We shall soon see now," returned Thad.

And they did. As soon as the boat landed on Long Island the carriage rolled off and drove rapidly away in the direction of New-town.

"That is lucky," observed Jerome. "We will be there as soon as they."

"They have chosen a very poor method, though, if they wanted to keep their trip out here a secret," observed Thad. "They might have gone in the cars and not been noticed, whereas if they drive into the village in that rig everybody there will know about it."

"Oh, well, there are criminals who appeared bound to give themselves away. But look at this. Here is still another."

As he spoke the carriage stopped again, and a rough-looking individual got in.

Burr had no trouble in recognizing him as the tramp he had seen the night before.

"That is one of Donald's pals," explained the detective.

"He's a pretty bird, I must say," sneered Francis.

"Just the kind of a duck to do dirty work."

"So I should imagine."

"He is the fellow I told you about who tried to throw the woman out of the boat and drown her."

"He looks like a fellow who would have about courage enough to drown a woman."

"However, in this case, he did not."

"No?"

"No. She bluffed him off. And again last night, when Donald pretended that it was the doings of the tramp entirely, she drew a revolver on him and made him confess that he was instigated by Donald himself."

"Not a very safe confederate to have around."

"No."

"However, you generally find these fellows arrant cowards."

"So you do. But see! Our folks are getting out."

The carriage had arrived at the foot of a hill on the sides and crest of which the village stood, and had stopped.

The three occupants had alighted and were about to proceed on foot the remainder of the way.

"I don't know but they were wise after all," remarked Thad. "But there is no need of our walking. We have nothing to conceal but our faces, and they are already pretty well covered."

The three people proceeded on foot and soon began to climb the hill.

Thad and his companion were about to follow them, when an idea occurred to the detective.

"I'll just put those folks to a little trouble," he observed.

"How is that?"

"Watch me."

When the buggy came up with the carriage Thad addressed the driver and said:

"You are from New York, are you not?"

"I am, sir," replied the driver.

"Well, sir, I am a detective, and I want to tell you that the people you have just driven out here are the worst sort of crooks. Now if you want to save yourself the mortification of going to jail, you had better drive right straight back to town."

The driver stared at the badge which Thad exhibited as he spoke, and then said:

"Wal, sir, it's all one to me. They've paid me me fare, and Oi'd as leaf go back empty as wid a load, anyway."

With that he wheeled his carriage, put whip and away he drove.

"Well, that is one of the tricks!" laughed Francis. "I should never have thought of that."

"The point is that if we have occasion to give these parties a chase they will have a deuce of a time getting out of town, as the trains only run every half hour."

"That's a good one. But where are our parties wandering to now?"

They had turned out of the road and were climbing a narrow footpath.

"Taking a short cut to the old woman's house," exclaimed the detective. "Let us drive up and beat them."

Francis whipped up, and they were soon at the top of the hill, and turning abruptly to the right, were not long in reaching the grounds of the murdered woman.

But they did not stop there.

Driving on past for a hundred yards or so and turning out of the road, they alighted and hitched the horse in a shed which happened to be convenient.

They then walked back to the house.

When they had reached the door Thad took a look about to see if the other parties were anywhere in sight, and as they were not, he took a key from his pocket—the identical key he had found in the road that morning—and opened the door.

Then locking the door on the inside, he said:

"Now, if we have been lucky enough to get in without observation, we are all right. We'll conceal ourselves in here and wait for them. If they come in and find the papers, we will then emerge from our hiding-places and recover the papers."

The two men then concealed themselves in a closet in the sitting-room and waited.

But it was a tedious task.

Instead of the three people coming as they expected, they did nothing of the kind.

Hour after hour dragged by, and still they did not put in an appearance.

"I wonder what it can mean?" muttered Thad, impatiently. "It cannot be that they have discovered that we are here, and are remaining away on that account."

"Either that, or they have concluded not to come here. In my opinion the papers were concealed somewhere else, and they won't come here at all."

"That would be a rough joke on us," remarked the detective dejectedly. "And I shouldn't wonder if that was the secret of their not coming."

The afternoon passed and night came on, and still the people did not come.

"Well," sighed the detective at last, "there is no use of staying here any longer. They are not coming, that is clear."

But the words were scarcely out of his mouth when something was heard at the door, and a little while afterward the sound of their voices proclaimed that the three people had arrived at last.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

THE three people did not come into the sitting-room where our friends were concealed, but went into another room which had been used as a bedchamber by the old woman.

Our friends could hear their conversation, however, and when they got into the bedroom they were heard to say:

"Light your lantern, and let us get the papers at once."

The voice was that of Donald.

There was a long silence after this, in which the detective supposed they were engaged in lighting the lantern.

"There you are," said the aforesaid voice at last. "Now where are the documents?"

"I don't know. I shall have to look for them."

This from the woman.

"I thought you knew right where to put your hands on them," muttered Donald.

"No, I only know the general locality, and I may be mistaken after all."

"What! There is a chance of our missing them entirely?"

"Yes."

"This is a pretty state of affairs, after coming away out here, not to find what we came for."

"Don't get impatient. Wait till we find that they are not here before you begin to swear."

"Well, hurry up and look for them."

"What's your hurry? There is plenty of time."

"No there is not plenty of time. Suppose those fellows we saw in the carriage should come upon us?"

"There is no danger of that. If they had been coming here they would be here now. They have evidently given us up and gone back before this."

"For aught we know they are in this house now."

"Nonsense!" cried the woman. "It is like your cowardice to suspect something of the kind."

"However, it would be as well to search the house for them before beginning the search for the papers," grumbled Donald.

"It isn't worth while. Hold the light, and I shall have the papers and we can be off in five minutes."

Then followed another silence, and Thad supposed they were searching for the documents.

"Find them?" Donald was heard to say at length.

"No."

"No?"

"I don't see them here. Maybe they are in that other drawer. Hold the light a little higher."

Another silence, and then:

"Well?"

"Yes, here they are."

"Good! Hand them down."

"Never mind. I'll hold on to them till I get down."

"We had better get in there," whispered Francis to the detective. "There is no telling but that fellow may destroy them as soon as he sets eyes on them."

"No, I think not," replied Thad. "Still, it would not be a bad idea to get in there."

In his haste to get out of the closet the young man lost his false beard, but he did not pause for that.

"Be cautious," warned the detective. "Do not rush in."

This had the effect of checking the young man, and he stole along cautiously until the two men were at the door of the bedroom.

The door was partially open and they could see in through the crevice.

The young man was holding the light and the woman was climbing down from a ladder which went up into the loft.

In her hands she held a package of papers yellow with age.

But where was the tramp?

He was nowhere to be seen.

Thad was puzzled.

At length a thought occurred to him, and he stepped to the outer door, opened it slightly and looked out.

There was the tramp in the yard in front of the house.

They had evidently stationed him there as a guard.

"I'll spoil his fun," mused the detective, as he turned the key in the door. "If they need his assistance in here they will be disappointed in not getting it."

He then returned to where he had left the young man.

But the latter was no longer there.

Burr peered into the room.

There he beheld Francis standing in the shadow behind the man and woman, and they evidently did not see him.

The woman still held the papers in her hand and an argument was ensuing.

"Let me have them!" demanded Donald.

"Not till you get down on your knees and pledge me that you will marry me the moment I show you the papers," returned the woman firmly.

"How absurd!" cried Donald. "I have already promised that as soon as I am satisfied that they are what you say I will go with you to the nearest minister and have the ceremony performed."

"But I cannot take your word. If you are not willing to get on your knees, we will go to the minister first. How will that suit you, dear?" she said tauntingly.

"I will do nothing of the kind."

"Then you will never get your hands on these papers."

"I will, I must! Be reasonable!"

"I am reasonable."

"You are not. You are obstinate."

"I am looking out for No. 1, like yourself."

"Give me the papers, I say!"

"I will not!"

Donald was getting into a terrible rage. Thad could see that his face was red and his eyes flashed like brands of fire.

"Give them to me!" he fairly roared.

"I will not," she cried firmly as before.

"Give them to me, or by Heaven, I'll kill you!" he muttered.

And he had the appearance of a man who was capable of the act he had threatened.

The woman only laughed scornfully.

This increased his rage beyond endurance.

He glared at the woman for an instant, and then quicker than a flash drew a revolver and was about to level it at her, but the next instant the weapon was knocked out of his hand and went spinning up in the air.

It had been the hand of Francis Jerome that did it.

But for some reason the fellow did not turn upon his adversary just then, but making a spring at the woman, snatched the papers out of her hand and tore them to ribbons before she could recover them.

"There, now!" he muttered. "Bring on your proofs of my illegitimacy, and see what I will do with them!"

Francis stood irresolute behind him, apparently watching for him to attack the woman.

And still Donald had not apparently noticed his presence.

Then on a sudden Donald turned as if to look for the revolver which had been knocked out of his hand, and seeing Francis, stopped and glared at him.

"Hell and furies!" he roared. "What are you doing here?"

"That is my business," returned Francis coolly.

Donald regarded him coolly for an instant, apparently pondering what move to make, and then suddenly he made a spring like a cat at her prey, and grasped the young man by the throat.

A short and sharp struggle ensued, but Donald was much the more powerful man, and in a moment he had hurled Francis to the floor and began to choke him.

Now was Thad's time for action.

He had no desire to shoot the assailant, but the next instant he rushed upon the scene, cane in hand, and with a few well-directed blows, caused the infuriated young man to relax his hold.

As soon as Ida saw Francis fall she made for the door, still holding the light so that it flooded the floor about the combatants.

With wild, staring eyes and face half concealed in shadow, she looked the ideal White Demon.

At the appearance of Thad on the scene the woman slipped out of the door and disappeared.

Donald, at the second blow from the detective's cane, rolled off of the young man whom he had down, and as he did so, caught up the revolver he had let drop.

Springing to his feet with the agility of a tiger, he backed into a corner and leveled the weapon at the detective.

"Now come on!" he cried.

And then raising his voice he yelled for the tramp whom he had left on guard outside.

The next instant footsteps were heard in the hall, but the tramp never reached the room.

He had no more than reached the door when Francis had regained his feet and met the fellow there.

The next instant a sounding blow from the young man's fist sent the tramp sprawling to the floor.

This had the effect of distracting Donald's attention temporarily and caused him to lose something of his presence of mind, and the detective was not slow to take advantage of the situation. Before the young man was aware of it Thad had him covered with his revolver.

"Up with your hands!" he cried. "Drop that pistol!"

Donald was panic-stricken.

With a face livid with terror and shaking in every limb as though he had been seized with ague, he dropped his pistol to the floor.

"Now," said the detective, "we shall see who is running this thing, you or I."

With that he stepped up and clasped a pair of handcuffs on the young man.

Donald stared at the detective in bewilderment.

He evidently did not even now recognize his old friend, but there had been a familiarity about the voice which had caused him to wonder where he had heard it.

Then of a sudden the truth appeared to flash upon him.

"Well, by Jove!" he cried in dismay. "Is it possible, Mr. Burr? How came you here?"

"Oh, I am everywhere where there are offenders," replied Thad dryly.

"But I have committed no offense, Mr. Burr. Why do you arrest me?"

"For drawing a weapon, for one thing, and for another—and I shall procure a warrant for that as soon as we get back to the city—the murder of Marie James!"

"You have no right to arrest me for that," demurred the young man.

"Certainly not without a warrant, but that I shall get as soon as we reach the city, as I said. In the mean time, I will hold you on the other charge."

"But there is no evidence against me as the murderer of old Mrs. James."

"Oh, yes, there is, a good deal."

"What is it?"

"I shall not stop to enumerate it now, but I have sufficient to warrant me in procuring a warrant for you."

"I declare, sir, that I am innocent. If you want the murderer, there he stands!"

And he pointed toward Francis, who stood a little way off.

The latter indulged in an ironical laugh, but as Thad glanced toward him, the light of the lantern, which Ida had dropped, fell upon his pale features, and showed them, Thad imagined, a little whiter than usual.

He made no other reply to the accusation than the laugh he had uttered, and Donald continued:

"He is the murderer, Mr. Burr, and he cannot deny it to me, for he has already confessed it."

Thad was dumfounded.

What could it mean?

He looked at Francis again, but the young man made no response to the repeated accusation, but he kept his eyes fixed upon his accuser, and there was a strange twitching of the lips.

"Do you mean to say that he confessed the murder to you?" questioned the detective, turning to Donald in dismay.

"He did, sir," was the firm and positive reply.

Again Francis uttered that low, cynical laugh.

"This is good!" he said, in a low, unimpassioned tone. "Very good!"

"What have you to say to the accusation, Mr. Jerome?" demanded Thad.

"Say?" he drawled, and followed it with his habitual laugh. "I say that it is not worth my while to answer."

"Why not?"

"The accusation is too ridiculous. The idea of my confessing to him! I'll leave it to yourself."

Put in that light, the detective could not fail to see the absurdity of the thing.

Why, indeed, should he have confessed to Donald on the first and only occasion of their meeting?

In an instant the detective's mind had undergone a complete revulsion.

The slight suspicion that had arisen from Donald's cool accusation vanished, and he was stung with remorse that he had ever for an instant entertained it.

"During that instant, too, the many unsavory discoveries he had made touching Donald's character stood out dark and vivid against the young man. His denials of things which he had afterward found to be true, his attempt to murder Ida, and his denial to her face, and finally, the fact that he was attempting to assume a character and position which he knew to be false.

All these things came into the detective's imagination and stood as witnesses against the prisoner; while the other man, although encompassed somewhat with inexplicable chains of circumstantial evidence, had cleared himself in the detective's eyes by his very frankness and indifference.

Striding up to Francis, Thad put out his hand.

"I ask your pardon," said he. "The thing, as you say, is too absurd to claim a moment's thought. I should have known better. But the manner in which it came and your actions caused me to falter for an instant. I believe—I know—you are innocent!"

"Thanks," drawled Francis. "I don't blame you under the circumstances. I was struck dumb for the instant with the audacity of the thing, but a moment later the absurdity of it caused me to laugh."

Donald ground his teeth with rage.

Glaring at Francis, he muttered with clinched teeth:

"Do you dare to deny that you told me you had murdered the old woman to prevent her from levying blackmail on your father any longer, sir? Do you deny telling me that you would just as soon I would get the position, as you would probably go to the gallows anyway? Do you dare to stand before me and deny these things, sir?"

Francis laughed dryly.

"Deny them, no," he replied. "Why should I go to the trouble? If an idiot or a child call me bad names I do not resent it. It would be unmanly. Your accusations are like the vaporings of an imbecile. Why should I pester my brain with them for an instant. They are—"

But the absurdity of the thing overcame him, and he ceased speaking and finished with a burst of laughter.

He then turned his back on his accuser and walked away.

"Murderer! Liar! Consummate villain!" hissed Donald after him. "Was ever such villainy hidden by such an ingenuous countenance?"

Burr had long since ceased to take any interest in the controversy.

His mind was already made up as to which was the guilty party, and he had other matters to attend to.

Taking up the lantern which Ida had let fall, he was gathering up the fragments of the papers which Donald had torn.

Having collected all the minutest fragments and made a package of them, he placed them in his pocket, and then ordered Donald to march before him out of the cottage.

Francis was then dispatched for the buggy, and the three men got in.

Ida and the tramp had disappeared, and the detective did not bother himself about them, but proceeded toward the city.

CHAPTER XIX.

PERPLEXING CLUES.

BURR's first action on getting back to the city, after having his prisoner committed to the Tombs prison, was to procure a warrant for him, charging him with the murder of Marie James.

His next was to return home and get to work at restoring the torn documents, which he believed would have great weight in the case which would soon come to trial.

This was a tedious task.

If there had been but one paper it would have been comparatively simple.

But there were no less than a dozen papers of different kinds and on different subjects.

This rendered it almost endless.

However, he was not a man to hesitate at difficulties like that, and set to work with a will.

He procured several large panes of glass and some paste.

This was necessary, as the documents were written on both sides, and if he had pasted them on another sheet of paper, one side of the writing would have been lost.

One of the first discoveries he made was that all but three of the documents were simply legal instruments, such as mortgages and leases, and therefore could have no interest for him, while the other three were letters.

These, he was not long in discovering, were written to Marie James by some person in France, and related to a child which had been placed in charge of the old woman.

This appeared to confirm the opinion that they were the right documents, and that they related to Donald.

Piece by piece the detective put the fragments together on the panes of glass, and hour after hour went by while the work slowly progressed.

Morning came and still found him at work.

His wife came and announced breakfast, but he would not stop long enough to eat.

Half the forenoon passed, and at last the last fragment was put in place, and this is what he had, in substance.

Three letters, written at different times, but all from one address in Paris, showed that Marie James had had a boy, who was the son of Manton Jerome by a former

wife, and that this boy had died at the age of twelve years.

The writer of the letters also had a son about the same age, and she proposed that Mrs. James should take the boy and bring him up as Donald Jerome, the real heir.

The letters showed that the proposition had been accepted by Mrs. James, who was to bring the boy up for a certain sum, and he was never to know who his parents were until he was old enough for the scheme which was afterward contemplated, to be put in execution.

The writer of the letters was Laura Donaldson.

This appeared to be conclusive enough.

The first part of the name, at least, belonged to Mrs. Jerome, and Thad had no doubt the rest of it belonged to Donald's mother.

As soon as he had completed his task, and refreshed himself with a bath and breakfast, the detective disguised himself as a ruffian of the stamp of the fellow whom he had seen enter Mrs. Jerome's house, and called upon the lady.

He had prepared a letter purporting to be from her son in the Tombs prison, which served as a passport for his admission to the lady's presence, and he was therefore admitted.

As he expected, she was as well as usual, but she was in a great rage over her son being in prison.

"The idea of them arresting him on that charge!" she declaimed. "He is no more guilty than you are, my good man!"

"That's lucky for him, then," mumbled the tramp. "They say, though, that the evidence is purty strong ag'in' him."

"Where is the evidence, I should like to know?" she snorted. "I can prove that he was here in this house from six o'clock until the next morning."

"That's lucky. Hev yer got witnesses to thet, mum?"

"Yes, we had a party that night, and there are no less than a dozen people who will swear that he was here."

"But they's one thing he wanted me to speak ter yer about."

"What's that?"

"They was some letters in the house where the old woman was murdered, whut tole about yer son not bein' the real heir of Manton Jerome."

The woman laughed derisively.

"Tell Donald he need not worry about those letters, as they are no more."

"Whut d'ye mean?"

"They have been destroyed."

"But he says not."

"He is mistaken. They were."

"By who?"

"That doesn't matter."

"He says the feller whut killed the old woman overlooked some letters—three on 'em, an' they're the very ones thet gives the snap away."

"He certainly knows better than that, for he destroyed the three letters himself."

"When?"

"It appears that you are very inquisitive, sir," she muttered. "Why, he knows that he destroyed the letters last night."

"He says he went out thar and tore 'em up, but then the detective come in on him, picked up the pieces and pasted them together, and now hes 'em."

"A detective did this?"

"Yes'm."

"How should Donald know anything about what the detective did?" she flouted indignantly.

"Well, as for the matter of that, your son does not know about it, madam, but the detective himself does!"

As he uttered the words, the detective arose, snatched off his wig and false beard, and stood before her in his true personality.

The woman was too much astounded to speak, and stood staring at him with wide-open eyes.

She had risen to her feet at the first ecstasy of her surprise, but as the full realization of the situation burst upon her, she sunk back helpless into her chair.

She never for an instant removed her eyes from the detective's face, and the expression of helplessness was pitiful.

Thad was touched.

It was with the greatest difficulty that he overcame his feeling of compassion.

But he realized that he had a duty to perform, and painful as it might be, it had to be done.

He hesitated a moment, however, to consider the best manner of beginning, and then slowly drew from under his ragged coat three panes of glass.

Resuming his seat close beside the lady, he began:

"Look at this letter, Mrs. Jerome," holding the first glass up before her eyes. "It is signed Laura Donaldson, as you see, but allow me to ask if it was not written by yourself?"

The woman stared at the restored epistle with bulging eyes.

She appeared to be unable to comprehend how the miracle of restoration had been accomplished.

Finally she said, in slow, measured tones: "Yes, I wrote the letter, Mr. Burr. But what of it?"

The answer and accompanying question was a poser for him.

It was a minute or two before he could regain his composure.

At length, however, he replied, dryly:

"Nothing. Only it proves that your son, Donald, otherwise, Edward, is not the son of Manton Jerome, as he would like to make it appear."

Thad expected to see the woman blanch at this, but he was disappointed.

She did not so much as change color.

"Certainly," she admitted, "it shows that my son is not the heir of Manton Jerome, which is a fact. But you are wrong in assuming that he wished to make it appear that he is."

Thad was taken aback at this statement.

He no longer wondered at the son being a cool liar.

"But, my dear madam," he protested, "that is exactly what he is doing. If he had not wanted to establish the fact, why should he have gone to all the pains of trying to destroy these papers?"

"He has never attempted to do anything of the kind, that I am aware of."

This was too much.

The detective had been accustomed to fabricators, but this was a trifle beyond his conception.

"But you told me awhile ago, Mrs. Jerome, when you thought I was only a tramp, and a messenger from your son, that he had destroyed the documents. And now you say that he never even attempted such a thing. How do you explain the discrepancy?"

The woman looked straight at him and shrugged her shoulders.

She saw that he was bewildered and evidently enjoyed it.

She even smiled at his expense, and in spite of his habitual coolness, he was uncomfortable thereat.

"You are puzzled, aren't you?" she finally said, with an arch smile.

"Not so much puzzled as astounded," he retorted rather sharply.

"Yes?" she rejoined archly

"Yes, very much so."

"At what, pray?"

"At—at—if I may say it, madam, at your audacity!" he finally made out to falter.

She laughed.

"My audacity, eh?" she smiled.

"Yes."

"Well, let me put you right, and perhaps you will not be so much astounded."

"I hope so."

"In the first place, understand me, I said that my son never destroyed the papers or attempted it, didn't I?"

"Yes, but—"

"One moment. I also said that he had never claimed—at least he never has since he found out better—that he was the son of Manton Jerome."

"So you did, and yet—"

"When you first came in," she interrupted, talking very rapidly, "claiming to come to me from Donald in jail, I told you that he had destroyed the papers."

"You did. But subsequently you said—"

"What?"

"That he had not."

"Nothing of the kind."

"Did you not say just now that your son had never attempted to destroy the papers?"

"I certainly did, and I told the truth."

Thad was more bewildered than ever.

He looked blankly at the woman, and she only smiled.

At length a light broke in upon him.

"What!" he exclaimed, "do you mean to say that Donald is not your son?"

"I mean to say that Donald is not my son," she replied calmly. "Has he not already told you so?"

"He has, and tried to establish the fact by a lot of letters which purported to come from his father, Manton Jerome, and I was fool enough to believe him until I learned of these other letters which prove that he is not the heir."

"Nevertheless, when he told you that he was not my son, he told you the truth; but when he claimed that the package of letters which he stole from my cabinet referred to him, he told a falsehood, although I will say to his credit that I believe he was probably not aware of the fact, and may not be yet."

Burr's head began to swim.

Of all the complex mysteries he had ever encountered, this was the worst.

It was in vain that he tried to get the tangle straightened out in his mind, it was too much for him, and he again appealed to the woman.

"Now, let me understand it," he began.

"You say that Donald is not your son?"

"That is what I said."

"And yet you have brought him up to believe that he was?"

"Yes."

"And the letters which he took from your desk do not refer to him?"

"No."

"But they do refer to your son, although they pretend not to do so?"

"They refer to my son, and they pretend to refer to no one else," she answered with dignity.

"But they say that the young man who now occupies the position of heir to Manton Jerome is not his son?"

"There is where you make the mistake."

"Then, for the love of mercy, unriddle the affair."

She laughed again merrily this time.

"I will accommodate you," she said, "lest you should be afflicted with some sort of mental disorder through trying to work out the puzzle."

She paused, and he simply said:

"Go on."

"To begin with, let me remind you that these letters were written twenty years ago."

"So they were."

"That is a good while ago, isn't it?"

"Yes. Go on," he said impatiently.

"A good deal may happen in twenty years. A good deal has happened in these twenty years. For one thing, the son of Manton Jerome by his second wife, who was exchanged for the present one and sent to be brought up by Marie James, has died."

"Died?"

"Yes, at the age of twelve."

"Then who is this Donald?"

"His right name is Edward Donaldson, and he is the son of the late Marie James."

"Her right name was Donaldson, then?"

"Yes, until she married her second husband whose name was James."

"And where does your son come in?"

"He is at present known by the name of Francis Jerome, which was the name he was baptized by. He is the legal heir of Manton Jerome, who was my first husband, and I want to see anybody depose him from his position."

"He has always been supposed to be the son of the second wife, however, has he not?"

"Yes, but that does not interfere with the legality of his heirship."

CHAPTER XX.

THE LIGHT BEGINNING TO BREAK.

THAD was thrown into a brown study by these unexpected revelations.

He was inclined to accuse himself of stupidity in allowing himself to be hoodwinked in some respects.

Still, he could not avoid complimenting himself on the fact of having believed in the innocence of Francis Jerome from the first, which was an offset.

After some reflection he resumed his inquiry.

"What was your motive for bringing up this boy as your own son, Mrs. Jerome?" he asked.

"Simply this: My own son had been taken away from me—that is, I had volunteered to have him go to his father, who I knew could do better by him than I could, and I naturally felt the want of a son to comfort and keep me company. Mrs. Donaldson's second husband was, if I may say it, a brute. He abused the boy shamefully, and his mother consented to allow me to take him, which I would not do unless he was to be known as my own son.

"The transfer was made, and he has lived with me ever since."

"To whom do these letters refer?"

"The boy who is dead."

"He was being brought up by Mrs. James, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Why have you kept these letters all this time, when you knew—or must have known—that they might some day compromise your son?"

"I had an object in it, which I should think you might guess."

"I confess that I cannot."

"Well, then, while my boy is provided for, it was also necessary for me to look out for No. 1. So long as there was ample proof that Francis was my son Mr. Jerome could not refuse to provide for me, but had those letters been destroyed, and he had discovered the fact, there would have been nothing but his honor to compel him to look out for me, as he had agreed."

"You did not have much faith in his honor, then?"

"Oh, yes, but 'most anybody will become careless in the course of time; besides, there was a chance of his dying. In which case, I would have had nothing to show."

"You are right, then, in keeping the letters. But are you not afraid to intrust them to this young man who is now in jail?"

"I would be if he still had the letters in his possession, but I was not fool enough, you may believe, to leave them in his possession."

"You have recovered them, then?"

"Oh, yes, some time since."

"Another thing, Mrs. Jerome."

"Well?"

"When he discovered the letters and demanded an explanation, did you tell him the whole truth about the matter?"

"Certainly."

"Did he believe you?"

"How could he help it?"

"True, and yet he affected not to. He claimed that you tried to explain the matter away."

"So I did at first. I did not want to tell him the truth so long as I could avoid it."

"What was your reason for that?"

"He had always believed he was my son, I loved him very dearly, and he loved me, and I did not want to undeceive him, for I knew that he must hate me as soon as he saw how I had imposed upon him. But I finally told him all."

"How did he take it?"

"He was very angry, called me all the names he could think of, and even threatened to kill me or himself, which would have been quite as bad."

"You said awhile ago that you knew him to be innocent of the murder of Mrs. James. Are you sure of that?"

"Positive."

"How are you so sure?"

"Did I not tell you that there was a household of people here, and that at least a dozen of them will testify that he never left the house after six o'clock?"

"This is strange. The evidence points to him as the guilty party, and the woman with whom he has been living says she knows he is guilty."

"You refer to Ida, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You would put very little faith in what she says if you knew her as well as I do."

"You know her, then?"

"I do."

"And yet she says that she never heard of you till two days ago, and pretends to have been greatly surprised when she heard that Donald had a mother."

The woman laughed heartily.

"Just like her," she said. "Why, she has known me for at least a year."

"Did you know that Donald was living with her?"

"No, not until recently, and she avers that she is married to him."

"So she told me; but I have reason to know that she is not."

"That was the first cause of our falling out," pursued the woman. "Ida claimed that she was married to him, and he did not deny it, why I do not know, but I suppose he thought it would be less cause for shame to let me think they were married."

"She is a bad character, then?"

"Oh, I do not know anything about her, except that she is very untruthful."

"Is not Donald somewhat that way himself?"

"I never knew him to be guilty of an untruth in my life."

"Well, then, I know more of him than you, for I have caught him in a number of lies, not to say worse shortcomings."

"What, for instance?"

"One thing, he tried to kill this woman, and then denied, and laid it to the ruffian who was with him the other night."

"You allude to the fellow they call Dolph?"

"Yes."

"It was he, and not Donald."

"But he confessed that it was Donald who had incited the act in the other's presence."

"That was because she threatened to kill Dolph, was it not?"

"Yes."

"That accounts for it. He was her former husband, I believe, and is terribly afraid of her. She can make him say anything."

"You do not believe that Donald tried to kill her, then?"

"Certainly not. He wouldn't kill a flea."

"You received a letter in cipher from Donald the other night, Mrs. Jerome. What was the meaning of it, and what was the meaning of the answer, also in cipher, which you sent him?"

This was a surprise for her.

If she had looked surprised when he removed his disguise, she looked doubly so now.

"How did you know about that?" she finally faltered.

"I had good right to know, madam," he answered. "I was the tramp who brought the letter from him and took yours."

"Is it possible?" she exclaimed, incredulously.

"It is."

"You are an adept in disguises."

"Somewhat, but you have not answered my question. What was the meaning of the letter?"

"Will it be of any benefit to you to know?"

"It will."

"Well, this girl, Ida, has a brother confined on the island as a prisoner, and we heard that he had escaped. My son—that is, Donald—wrote to ask me if he should comply with the girl's request to assist him in getting ashore. I felt a touch of compassion for the poor girl, who had come to me about the matter crying as though her heart would break, and under the impulse of the moment, wrote him to assist the fellow, by all means."

"But why should you have written in cipher?"

"Don't you see, if the police had got hold of the letter and it had been written in regular fashion, they would have prosecuted us for assisting a prisoner to escape?"

Burr was inclined to think the explanation a lame one, but as it corroborated with Donald's, he concluded to let it pass until he should have an opportunity of learning better.

"There is another matter, Mrs. Jerome."

"What is it?" she asked impatiently.

"When I called at your house the other night you were reported as being ill—too ill to be seen. But when I came with the note, in the guise of a tramp, you appeared to be as well as usual. But when I again called next day you were reported as still being too ill to be seen. How do you explain that?"

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Burr," she said, coloring slightly, "that was a ruse on my part. I did not want to see you, for Donald told me that you were working upon

the case of Mrs. James's murder, and as I was supposed to know something about it, I knew you would question me, and I did not want to answer all the questions."

"I presume, then, that if I had come this time in my true personality I would have been denied admission to your presence?"

"You would. I should certainly have availed myself of the former ruse to escape this terrible ordeal. But," she went on, drawing a deep sigh, "it had to come some time, I suppose, and I am truly glad it is over."

With that she arose, as an indication that she desired the interview to close.

Thad took the hint, and also arose.

"There is but one thing more," he ventured. "What shall you do with regard to Donald?"

"Nothing," she replied curtly.

"Will you make no effort to get him out of jail?"

"That would be folly. As he is confined on a charge of murder, there is no such thing as bailing him, and I shall let matters rest until his trial comes on, and then go there with an array of witnesses that will surely astonish everybody, and prove an *alibi*."

"You will visit him in the mean time?"

"I may," she rejoined indifferently.

"I presume you are sure as to the day of the murder and the date of your party, Mrs. Jerome?"

"Quite."

The last sentence was uttered as she walked toward the door as a hint that she wished him to depart, and he took the hint.

When the detective got into the street he was more bewildered than ever.

The interview with the woman had been anything but satisfactory, and he believed more fully than he had hitherto that Donald was guilty.

He could not help but see, however, that it was going to be no easy matter to prove the case against him.

Especially would this be the case if, as she had said, she could muster an array of witnesses to prove that he was at home on the night of the murder.

Under the circumstances, there was but one hope of proving his guilt—if he were guilty—and that would be that the woman had made a mistake as to the date.

In his present state of resentment against both the young man and his foster-mother, the detective almost hoped that she had made a mistake, no less for the conviction of Donald, than the clearing of Francis.

Meanwhile he returned home and, attiring himself in a neat walking suit, he called at the flat of Ida, for the double purpose of learning if she was in, or what had become of her after the affair of the previous night, and to learn what she had to say with regard to her part in the business.

To his surprise, he not only found her at home, but in the most amiable frame of mind.

"Why, good-morning, Mr. Burr!" she exclaimed. "You see I have learned your name after all. Come right in. I am delighted to see you!"

Thad could not avoid looking at the woman with some surprise.

What a change there had come over her since he had seen her the night before, when she appeared to be the typical White Demon.

She had never appeared more beautiful and fascinating than she did at this moment, and if she had a care in the world she certainly did not show it.

He could not help wondering, also, if she had any idea that it was he she had seen in the cottage in Newtown the previous evening.

But she soon put him at ease on that point, for as he took a seat on the sofa, and she settled down close beside him, she asked:

"How do you feel, sir, after your adventure last night?"

He regarded her curiously, and noticed that there was a mischievous twinkle in her eye.

"First-class," he replied. "How, may I inquire, do you feel after your share of it?"

"Never better," she rejoined with a wicked laugh.

What a heartless woman! he could not help saying to himself.

"That was a nice trap I got the boy into, wasn't it?" she ran on.

"Trap?" he could not help exclaiming.

"Yes, certainly."

"That you got him into?"

"Why not?"

"I was not aware that you had anything to do with it."

"No?"

"No, I did not. How do you make that out?"

"You are not posted, then," she laughed.

"But how did you get him into a trap?"

"Can't you see?"

"I fail to see, I must confess."

"Then you are greener than I thought."

"Please answer my question."

"I will. Don't you remember of questioning me night before last when you were here about where the papers were?"

"Yes."

"And I would not tell you?"

"You would not."

"Well, I know something about the methods and tricks of detectives, and I knew that wherever I might go the following day—having told you that I was going after the papers—you would follow me. The more I thought over the matter the more convinced I became that you would do it. So the first thing I did after you left was to write a note to Ned telling him that I would go after the papers the next day and that I wanted him to go with me. This I posted that night so that he would get it the first mail in the morning. About ten o'clock a messenger brought me an answer from him, saying that he would meet me at Third avenue."

"Which he did."

"Which he did. Did you think I did not know who the party was whom I saw laying for me outside there? And did you think I did not see you, out of the corner of my eye; getting into the buggy? Perhaps you also imagine I didn't notice that the young man whom you had with you had suddenly grown a beard!"

Here she paused to indulge in a hearty laugh at her own perspicacity.

After a little she resumed:

"Perhaps, also, I did not see you order our driver to return to the city? And perhaps I didn't laugh in my sleeve when I thought how dismayed Ned would be when he discovered the trick?"

"You are a keen one, I admit," said Thad, unable to suppress his own merriment. "But what was your motive for wishing to trap Ned, as you call him?"

"The same motive that I have had all along. Did I not tell you that I would do all I could to help you cage him?"

"Yes, but I did not believe you were in earnest."

"That is the way with everybody. Because I will laugh occasionally instead of wearing a long face all the time, they refuse to believe me in earnest. I will show some people one of these days how earnest I am."

"But you failed to get a confession out of him, after all."

"That is true, and between you and me, I begin to believe the poor fool is innocent. His mother claims that she can prove that he was at home the night of the murder. What if it should turn out to be the other fellow after all?"

CHAPTER XXI.

LIGHT FROM A DIFFERENT SOURCE.

THAD was more than ever perplexed at this strange enigma of a woman.

It was hard to determine which was the greatest puzzle, she or Mrs. Jerome.

"What makes you think now that he is innocent?" he asked.

"Oh, several reasons."

"Name some of them."

"Well, in the first place—I don't know whether you know it or not—but Mrs. James was his mother."

"So I have just learned."

"That would be a pretty good reason of itself, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it would seem to be, but men have been known to murder their mothers."

"He wouldn't have done such a thing, though, I'm confident."

"And yet you thought he tried to murder you."

"Yes, but that is different."

"Well, what else?"

"In all the talks I have had with him he has never let drop a single suspicious word."

"That may be due to his caution."

"Another thing, although it was to his interest to destroy the papers which we went out to get last night, he did not know until you told him that they had been destroyed. Nor did he know until I told him that there were any papers which disproved his being the heir of Mr. Jerome."

"He may have affected this."

"I do not believe it."

"Why?"

"Because he tells me everything, especially his bad things."

"Then why, if you believed him to be innocent, did you connive to trap him last night?"

"Because I believed him to be guilty then."

"This opinion is of modern birth, then?"

"Yes, it is only since last night that I came to think he was innocent."

"But you say that it would be funny if it should turn out that the other fellow was guilty. What leads you to believe him guilty?"

"He confessed that he was, to Ned."

"Francis denies that."

"But I have something besides Ned's word for that."

"What?"

"A person we met over in Newtown last night."

"Who is he?"

"It isn't a he, it's a she."

"Well, who is she?"

"Her name is Melville—Marion Melville."

"What does she know about it?"

"She appears to know a good deal about it. She was well acquainted with Francis Jerome, so she says, and she says that he was over to her house on the night of Friday, September fifth."

"The deuce you say!" ejaculated Thad, greatly astonished. "What was he doing at her house?"

"She says he came there about eight o'clock, very much intoxicated, very wet and covered with blood!"

"Great Scott!"

Thad's brain began to whirl again.

Was it possible, after all, that these circumstances which Francis had spoken of so lightly were really clues?

He began to think that he had lost his detective cunning that he should have been so deceived in these two men.

"Covered with blood, eh?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Did he offer any explanation regarding his condition?"

"Yes, she says he told her that he had been thrown from his horse and received a knock on the nose which caused it to bleed. She washed the blood off his clothes, not thinking but what he told her was perfectly true."

"How did she come to speak of the affair to you?"

"We went to her house to wait till it was dark before going to the cottage, as Ned was unwilling to go there in daylight. She is an old friend of his mother, you know, and we went there for supper. Of course it was perfectly natural that we should get to speaking of the murder. You know how affairs of that kind excite villagers."

"Yes."

"Well, as I say, we got to speaking of the murder, and she remarked that she knew of a certain person who might be suspected only for his good name and high standing in society. We asked her who it was, and she did not want to say at first, and would not say, in fact, until Ned spoke up and mentioned the name of Francis Jerome, and then she became confused, and finally admitted that he was the man."

"What more did she say about it?"

"That is about all. He just came there and told her that he had met with a little accident, and then she noticed the blood on his clothes, and asked him where it had come from, and he told her that his horse had fallen or thrown him, I forget which, and knocked his nose."

"He said nothing that would lead her to suspect that he had been guilty of any crime?"

"I presume not, as she had no suspicion of it, and when Ned told her that there was strong suspicion of the young man she scouted the idea, and said she knew him too well to believe anything of that kind about him."

"By Jove, this is a pretty serious matter. I shall have to see this woman. Who is she, anyway?"

"She is a widow, and she keeps a sort of a boarding-house. She lives a short distance from the cottage."

"What did Ned say about it?"

"He laughed when we got outside, and said that he would have clear sailing now, if he could only get possession of the papers. I suppose you know he destroyed them?"

"Yes, and I also know that I restored them again, and now have them in my possession."

It was now Ida's turn to be surprised.

"You don't tell me!" she exclaimed. "How in the world did you manage it?"

"Oh, I have a way of doing such things. By the way, have you been to see Ned since he was locked up?"

"Yes, I was there this morning."

"How does he feel?"

"He is hopeful."

"Did he say anything about the discovery he made last night?"

"Oh, yes, he had a good deal to say about that, and wanted me to be sure to tell you about it. He would also like to see you."

"I shall see him, but not until I have made another trip to Newtown. By the way, would you mind going with me?"

"I would like it the best in the world."

"Very well, get ready, and we will start at once."

"I'm with you," she cried, jumping up. "I'll be ready in five minutes."

What a revulsion of feeling had taken place in Thad's breast!

An hour before he would scarcely have listened to argument which would in the slightest degree have implicated Francis Jerome or exonerated Donald.

Now, however, he was enthusiastic to trace up any evidence which would tend to convict the former and acquit the latter.

Every circumstance which had occurred in his dealings with Francis now came up before him.

His strange conduct the previous night when Donald had accused him, the desperation of his cynical laugh, which the detective had put no store by at the time, believing, as he did, in his innocence, and, above all, his affected indifference about the matter, all stood out bold and glaring now, and accused the young man of the crime.

As he sat there in Ida's little parlor going over in his mind the complex ramifications of this most perplexing of cases, a sudden thought came to him.

It was a trivial matter, but it might mean a great deal.

He recalled the fact that the murderer of Marie James had an umbrella. Francis Jerome admitted that he had had one when he started from home, but could give no account of what he had done with it, but was confident that he did not have it when he returned home.

Other circumstances proved this.

The fact of his being wet proved it.

The question was, what had become of the umbrella?

If that could be found, it might solve the whole problem.

But the question was to find it.

He had grown so enthusiastic over this small, but important, circumstance that when Ida returned to him to announce that she was ready to go, she found him pacing the floor and gesticulating wildly, and muttering:

"The umbrella! The umbrella! By Jove! that is the thing! We must find the umbrella!"

He was brought to his senses by a wild laugh from the girl.

"Why, what's the matter?" she questioned, still laughing. "Do you think it's going to rain? If it does, I have an umbrella—half a dozen, if you want them."

"Rain? No. Who the deuce said anything about rain?" he muttered, embarrassed that she should have discovered the train of his thoughts. "Are you ready?"

"Yes, quite ready," she answered, still laughing at his strange conduct.

"Very well, come on."

And without another word he bolted from the room, followed by the little woman, who was not quite sure whether he had not suddenly taken leave of his senses.

Not a word passed until they reached the street, and Thad was bolting ahead without regard to his companion, and at a rate of speed which caused her to almost trot to keep up with him.

This had continued for a quarter of a block, when she at last called out, nearly out of breath:

"Look here, sir, if you are going to walk all the way and go at that speed, I'm out of it."

"I beg a thousand pardons," he cried, stopping short. "I am in such a state of excitement over the developments of the last few minutes that I am half beside myself. We'll take a carriage."

With that he looked about, and seeing a carriage near by, called it, and the pair got in.

"Let me see," he said when they were seated in the carriage, consulting his watch, "if that villain of a driver will only make time, we may reach Long Island City in time to catch that two-thirty train, and if we do, it will take us there quicker than to drive out in the carriage."

"Punch him up with a dollar-bill," laughed the girl, who had as little idea of the value of money as a bird has of the air it soars through.

"Good! I'll profit by the hint. Here, Jehu!" he called, putting his head out of the window, "we want to reach that two-thirty train from Long Island City. See if this won't grease your wheels," he went on, handing him, not a one-dollar, but a two-dollar bill.

The effect was magical.

The driver cracked his whip, and the next instant they were whirling over the pavement at a phenomenal pace.

Having accomplished which feat, the detective settled back into his seat and gave himself up to silence and reflection again.

Again he went over the whole story of the two young men, and again he came to the episode of the umbrella.

This threw him into a violent state of excitement again.

"By Jove!" he muttered to himself. "That's the thing. The umbrella's the very clue. I wonder I didn't think of that in the first instance. Stupid that I was that I did not think of the umbrella. I would probably have been at the bottom of this matter days ago if I had only thought of the umbrella."

Again he was aroused from his reverie by that wonderful laugh.

The girl, sitting there beside him, doubtless busy with her own thoughts, and hearing him suddenly break forth and prate in an insane manner, as she thought, about an umbrella, was so struck with the ridiculousness of the situation as to be unable to restrain her merriment.

"The devil!" he muttered, stealing a half-angry glance at the girl.

"Oh," she murmured softly. "I thought it was the umbrella."

Here she went off in another one of her aggravating fits of laughter.

He was unable to harbor any resentment he might have felt, long, nor could he escape the contagion of her good-humor, and soon joined her in a hearty guffaw.

"It must have sounded ridiculous to you?" he said at last. "But one is apt to think aloud when in a state of great excitement."

She was silent a moment, and then ventured:

"What was it about the umbrella, sir?"

"Why, I'll tell you," he rejoined, laughing at what had become a very absurd topic to him by this time. "Since you told me about this woman and what she had said about Francis Jerome, I have been ruminating over the subject and a little matter occurred to me which had escaped me before, and yet which may serve to solve the whole mystery."

"What is it, sir, an umbrella?"

"That's it, an umbrella. The very thing that I was harping on and which set you to laughing. The fact is, that whoever the murderer was, he had an umbrella. Francis Jerome had one when he left home, but had

none when he returned. The fact of his being wet also proves this. Now, the thing I want to do is to find what became of that umbrella."

"I see!" she exclaimed, growing as much excited as he had been; "if you find an umbrella on the premises, and it is identified as his, you will have him dead to rights. Is that it?"

"That is the idea, exactly. We only need to find that umbrella, no matter if it has been carried away, just so we find it, and, as you say, if it can be identified as his, we have the completed chain of circumstantial evidence."

"Then, we will lose no pains to find it."

"That shall be our first object after interviewing the woman who saw him with the blood on his coat."

"And shirt," she added.

"If he tells the truth, he had no blood on his shirt," objected the detective.

"Oh, well, we'll pass on that," she laughed, "and allow it to have only been his coat and pants."

"I don't mind your including the vest," he laughed.

By this time they had reached the ferry, and driven on.

Five minutes or so later they were on the opposite side of the river, and just in time to catch the Long Island Railroad train at two-thirty.

It was only a ride of twenty minutes, but it seemed like as many hours to the eager detective, who could not get to the spot where his final work was to be done too quickly.

Few words passed between them. He was too busy with his thoughts, and seemed to think that conversation would interfere with the speed of the train, but they were soon there, and it did not take them long to reach the house of Mrs. Melville.

CHAPTER XXII.

CLUES WITHOUT END.

MRS. MARION MELVILLE was one of those gossiping women to whom it is the greatest treat of their lives to get hold of a choice bit of scandal.

And to have any one seek her for information was simply unheard-of-delight.

So when Ida called the widow down and told her that there was a detective anxious to consult her with regard to the matter she had spoken of the night previous, the old woman was in raptures.

She hastened to meet the detective as if he had been a crowned head or a curio, and ushered him and the girl into her best parlor with great unction.

When all were seated, Thad began:

"This young lady informs me, Mrs. Melville, that a young man called here on the night of September fifth, the night of the murder, and that he was wet from the rain-storm which prevailed that night, and moreover, his clothes were covered with blood. Is that true?"

"It is, sir," replied the old lady gleefully. "He came in at exactly five minutes after eight, and I never in all my born-days see such a sight as he was."

"How are you so positive as to the time?"

"Why, you see, he said he was hungry, and wanted to know if I could let him have supper. You know our supper is over by seven, and I told as much, and that there wa'n't a scrap to eat, 'cept what was as cold as pickles, and he said it couldn't be much arter seven, he thought. I looked at the clock thar on the mantel, and it was jest five minutes to eight, as I say, and I told him as much. Then I noticed that he was kivered with blood, and I said, 'Laws a massy, whar in nature did yew git all thet blood from, Mr. Jerome?' And he said, kinder careless like, thet his horses had throwed him and bumped his nose. I asked him whar his critter was, and he said he'd be hanged if he knowed. Runned home, meb-be. So I sot to and cleaned the blood and dirt off his clothes."

"Was there any blood on his shirt front?"

"I dunno as to thet. I know thar was plenty on his coat and vest and trowsers."

"Did he explain where he had been?"

"No, only thet his critter had throwed him, and as he didn't say no more about it, I tuck it fer granted thet he'd bin out ridin'

and, bein' purty boozy, it wa'n't hard fer the critter tew throw him."

"You are certain as to the date, are you?"

"Perfect, fer it was my Johnny's pay-day, and he'd jest come in and give me his money. Ye see, he's supposed to be paid on the fu'st, but the railroad—he works fer the Long Islan'—ginerally makes it the fourth or fifth. This time it was the fifth."

"Did he stay for supper? That is, did you get him his supper?"

"No, he wouldn't wait till I could cook nothin', and mosied off in the rain again."

"Did he have an umbrella?"

Ida tittered.

"No, sir, and I wondered at it, too, for fine gentlemen like him ginerally has an umbrella when they comes to the country, but he didn't hev none, and poked right off in the pour jest as he was. I thought 'bout callin' him back an' givin' him one, but then I thought my umbrellas wouldn't be fine enough for him as was used to silk ones, don't ye know."

"When did you first hear that the old lady had been murdered?"

"Not till next mornin'. Nobuddy knowed nothin' 'bout it till then."

"When you heard of it, did you connect the circumstance of the young man coming covered with blood with the tragedy?"

"I kinder thought thar might be somethin' in it, but then when I come to think on it, I thought no, a gentleman of his high standin' in sassiety could never do nothin' like thet, and druv it outen my head."

"When he came in out of the rain and you saw that he was wet, did you ask him anything about why he did not have an umbrella?"

"Yas, I said, 'Peers cur'us thet yew hain't no umbrella, Mr. Jerome.'"

"What did he say?"

"I ferget now a'most, though I think he said he'd lost it or had fergot to bring one, er somethin' like thet."

"Have you heard of an umbrella being found on the premises of the murdered woman?"

"Peers to me, now thet ye speak on't, I did hear somethin' 'bout some'n findin' an umbrella in the garden. My Johnny kin tell ye when he comes hum."

"What time does he come, Mrs. Melville?"

"At five."

Thad looked at his watch.

It was just half past four.

"He ought to be here in half an hour, then," he said.

"Yes, if he ain't delayed. Sometimes they keeps him overtime to do odd chores, and then they pays him fer the overtime, and I kin jest tellye it comes in mighty handy, 'specially—"

"I think," interrupted the detective, turning to Ida, "that I will employ the time in going over and calling on the magistrate. He may have made some new discoveries."

"Very well. Shall I wait here?"

"Do as you like."

"Is it far?"

"No, only a short distance."

"Then I will accompany you."

They left the house, after thanking the landlady for her information, and promised to be back in time to see Johnny.

"I was anxious to get away from that old gossip," explained the girl, when they were away from the house. "If I had been left there with her, she would have talked the arm off me by the time you got back, I am confident."

Thad was fortunate enough to find Mr. Gibson at home, and he was more than rejoiced to see the detective.

"What progress?" he asked, the first thing.

"First rate," returned Thad. "I have about traced up the criminal, I think. I want a few more clues to complete the chain of circumstantial evidence, and I have come out here after them."

"Well, I do declare!" exclaimed the good-natured magistrate. "I concluded that you had all the clues you wanted before you left that morning."

"Oh, no. I only found enough to start on. The work was then just begun. What I discovered that morning did not fix the guilt on any one in particular."

"But it was a mighty clever piece of work

that you did do," declared the magistrate earnestly. "I shall never forget how cheap you made that amateur detective look. He was the worst cut up man I ever saw."

"The trouble with him, like most new beginners, he knew too much at the outset."

"That's about it. But what have you come over after this time, Mr. Burr?"

"Well, to state it briefly, an umbrella," replied the detective.

Even now Ida could not repress a little laugh.

"An umbrella?" cried the magistrate. "Why, you don't think it will rain, do you?" he said, laughing.

"It may. But seriously, I have run my man down to the point of—an umbrella, metaphorically speaking."

"Oh, come to think of it, you did say the young man carried an umbrella. Well, what about it? Have you found it?"

"No, that is just what I want to find. Have you heard of any one finding an umbrella about the premises?"

"No, I haven't. Let me see," mused Mr. Gibson. "My boys were running about the place that morning. They might have heard something about one. I'll call them."

With that he called in his two boys, who were about ten and twelve, respectively, and they were questioned regarding the umbrella, but neither of them heard anything about any one finding one, nor had they found any.

They thought, however, that a certain playmate of theirs might know something about it, and he was sent for.

But it was the same old story.

He knew no more than the others, but thought that still another one, whom he mentioned, might. But Thad did not deem it worth while.

He would go back to Mrs. Melville's and see what Johnny knew in the premises.

And so the detective and his companion wended their way back to the boarding-house.

Johnny had returned, but like the rest, he had heard nothing of an umbrella. However, he knew a boy who would be likely to know, if anybody.

"Very well," said Thad, now pretty well disgusted in his search for the article, "you go and see what you can find out Johnny, and if you run across the umbrella I'll give you a five-dollar bill."

Johnny, tickled to death with the prospects of the money, darted off, while Thad, motioning the girl to follow him, left the house.

"Where now?" she questioned curiously.

"I am going back to the cottage and have a look myself," replied the detective. "These people wouldn't find an elephant if he were lying in the middle of the road. The chances are that the umbrella is still lying about there somewhere."

"It's a wonder you didn't think of that in the first place," ventured Ida.

"I did think of it, but then I thought it hardly possible that an article of that description could remain on the ground where so important an event had happened without being discovered by somebody before now."

A sharp walk of ten minutes brought them to the house of the late Mrs. James.

The place looked gloomy enough with the blinds closed and the general air of desolation which had already set in.

Ida shuddered as they passed into the grounds, and cast her eyes suspiciously about.

Thad noticed her action and laughed.

"Not afraid of ghosts, I hope?" he laughed.

"No, but it's kind of nerve-testing to enter a place where there has been a murder committed."

"If you are timid now, what were you last night when you entered after dark?"

"Oh, then I didn't mind it so much, because it was dark and you couldn't see how dreary and lonesome things looked."

When they had reached the house by way of the little gravel walk Thad said:

"In order to save time Ida, if you are not afraid, I will go around one side of the house and you may go around the other."

"Oh, I'm not afraid now," she averred. "It's all over. It was only while coming in first that I felt timid."

"Very well, then, you take the left and I will take the right."

And, parting at the front of the house, the two went around the two sides of the old cottage.

Thad kept the path until he reached the back of the house, and searched every inch of ground.

But finding nothing in this course, he turned out of the path and wandered over the weed-covered and tangled garden.

He sought particularly about the flower-beds where he had seen the tracks and the mark made by the umbrella on the first morning after the murder.

But all to no purpose.

Every inch of ground was gone over carefully, but no sign of an umbrella was to be found.

"He's dropped it in the house," mused he. "Or else some of these jays have found it, and, prizing it more highly than they do the ends of justice, are too infernally mean to give it up. A curse on such people, say I!"

But at that moment he was surprised at hearing a shrill screech.

In his absorption in his work he had forgotten the existence of Ida, but he realized at once that it was her cry.

What could have happened her.

Had she been frightened at some imaginary apparition, or had some real harm come to her?

And at once a thousand images of imaginary enemies, among them the ruffian who had attempted to drown her, arose before him.

He was about to hasten to her side, when the cry was repeated.

It was a strange cry

Not exactly that of distress, and he could not make out what it portended.

A moment later he was around to the side of the cottage on which she had come, when to his astonishment he found her standing there nearly splitting her sides with laughter, while in one hand she held an umbrella.

As soon as she espied the detective, she burst out in a renewed peal of laughter, and called:

"Here's your umbrella, mister! Now I hope you won't have any more nightmares."

In an instant Thad was at her side.

With a nervous hand he snatched the umbrella from her.

There was nothing humorous in the affair for him.

It all meant the gravest matter.

He turned the article over and examined it.

It was a fine silk umbrella, such as would only belong to a man of wealth and taste.

Every portion underwent the severest scrutiny.

Handle, make, and everything was examined, and at length he opened it.

That solved the problem.

There, stenciled on the inside of the silk was the name in white letters:

FRANCIS S. JEROME.

Thad almost screamed with delight.

He could hardly contain himself, and in his ecstasy actually caught the girl and kissed her.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed. "We have found it! Here is the proof which all the detectives this side of Jericho cannot down."

"What is it?" inquired the girl, almost afraid of him in his strange frenzy.

"Why, don't you see?" he cried, turning the umbrella round so that she could read the name. "Look at that! 'Francis S. Jerome!' What more do we want?"

"That settles it, I guess," she ventured.

"Settles it? I guess it does. If I had seen him commit the act with my own eyes, I couldn't be more positive of it. This is as good as positive evidence."

He gradually cooled down after a little, and proceeded to examine the article more thoroughly.

"Yes," he finally said. "It is all right. The dirt and wet on it show that it has lain here for at least a week. There is no doubt about it. Little girl, you are a jewel! Where did you find it?"

"Right here under this rosebush," rejoined Ida timidly.

"Yes, and the rosebush is right under the window. The fellow came round here to peep at his victim before going in to do his work."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CASE OF WEAKENING.

BEFORE finally quitting the premises it occurred to Burr to take another look at the inside of the house.

He had still retained the key, and, opening the front door, he and Ida went in.

As he stepped across the threshold something came into his mind which he hadn't thought of before.

Turning to Ida, he asked:

"See here, where did you folks get a key to get in last night?"

For the first time since he had known her, the girl blanched and appeared to lose her self-possession; but, she soon recovered her equanimity and answered:

"I think Ned got it of the old woman where we were."

"Mrs. Melville?"

"Yes."

"What business had she with a key to this cottage?"

"I don't know, sir. In fact, I wouldn't say for certain that he got it of her, but I suppose he did, as I don't know where else he could have got it."

"You are sure that he had a key?"

"Oh, yes; I know he had a key, for he unlocked the door when we got here."

Having been a familiar of the old woman who occupied the cottage, it was not entirely unnatural that he should have been in possession of a key, and yet the circumstance impressed the detective strangely, as had also the conduct of the girl when he had asked her about the key.

However, he had already had so many surprises and disappointments since beginning work upon this remarkable case, that he concluded not to bother his head over the present apparently trivial affair.

They passed on into the cottage, and found everything about as it had been left on the morning of the murder.

A few things had been moved about by the undertaker who had removed the remains, but for the most part there was very little change.

When they reached the bedroom where Ida had discovered the papers the thought occurred to him that there might possibly be more documents in the same place.

"Where did you find those papers?" he questioned.

"Up there," she replied, pointing toward a scuttle leading to a loft, which was reached by means of a ladder, "in an old bureau."

"Did you get all there were?"

"Yes, all I could find."

"I wonder if there might not be more?"

"Maybe. Shall I go up and see?"

"Never mind; I will go."

And he mounted the ladder, climbed up through the scuttle and was soon in the loft.

It was quite dark up there, but by lighting a match and holding it up, he succeeded in finding the old bureau. The drawers were not locked and he had no trouble in opening them.

The first one or two were empty, the third one contained some old rags, but in the fourth he discovered what he was looking for, a package of papers.

He did not have much idea that they would have any value, but he took them from the drawer and carried them downstairs.

"What did you find, mister?" inquired Ida archly.

"I don't know what there is yet," he rejoined, "and we haven't time to examine them just now, so I will take them home with me and look over them at my leisure."

He made a parcel of the papers and putting them under his arm, signified his readiness to go.

On their way to the depot, Thad thought it just as well to stop and see old Mrs. Melville again, although the girl advised him not to do so for some inexplicable reason, and he stopped.

Taking the old woman aside, he asked her if Donald had got a key from her the night previous.

"Why, no!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "I ain't got no key tew thet house. Great Powers! dew yew think I'd hev a key to a haunted house?"

"I hardly believed you would, but I did

not know but the magistrate or somebody had left the key with you."

Thad was greatly perplexed over the matter of the key.

It was, seemingly, a matter of no importance, but, like the umbrella, it might mean a good deal, and he could not dispel that thought during his return to the city.

It was eight o'clock when he reached the city, and yet, such was his eagerness to be through with the business of this perplexing case, that he was not satisfied until he had procured a warrant for the arrest of Francis Jerome.

So, after he had got his dinner, the detective took a cab and drove to the house in Fifth avenue for the purpose of serving the warrant.

He took the tell-tale umbrella along with him, but even with this damning evidence against the young man and the warrant in his pocket, the sight of his face caused a sense of misgiving in the mind of the astute detective, and he felt, in spite of his resolution to be stern and inflexible, that he would rather some one else had the job.

Francis met him with his usual cordiality, mingled with his habitual languor, and led the way mechanically into his sitting-room.

"I bring you in here," he explained, "because I know you won't mind smoking a cigar while we talk, and then we can be alone."

"I'm afraid," interrupted the detective, rejecting the proffered cigar and refusing to sit, "that we will have no time for either sociability or civility."

"The deuce, you say!" drawled the young man. "Business must be moving. Really, though, I envy busy people. I'm so confoundedly idle myself, that I don't know what to do with myself half the time. I sometimes think of procuring a situation at—"

"With your permission, Mr. Jerome," interposed the detective, cutting him short, "we will postpone this speech to another occasion. The business upon which I have called this evening is of far graver import than anything we have discussed yet. To be brief with you—"

"I see," interrupted Francis, with his usual indifference, "you've succeeded in tracing the guilt to me, and have a warrant in your pocket for me. I suspected as much when you came in."

"It was the old adage of a guilty conscience requiring no accusing, verified," returned Thad dryly.

But, the next instant, he was sorry he had said it, for the look of injury—and that of injured innocence—which the young man gave him, touched him deeply.

In all his experience the detective had never met with a similar case.

Everything went to prove that the young man was guilty, and yet, with it all, he could not find it in his heart to believe it while looking Francis in the face.

Young Jerome was silent, and turned a little pale at the heartless utterance; but, after the transitory expression of injury passed, it gave place to one of resentment.

"I am aware, sir," he said in a low, tremulous voice, "that, under the circumstances, you have a right to arrest me, notwithstanding my innocence, but I question your justification in coming into my house and insulting me. It is a breach of etiquette and courtesy which I would not be guilty of were I to enter the hut of a pickpocket to arrest him."

The censure went deep, for the reason that the detective felt that it was deserved.

"I beg a thousand pardons!" he returned, in a broken voice. "I realized the rudeness, not to say the injustice of the remark the moment it was uttered. I have no right, as you say, to offer an indignity to one who, although proven guilty, has always acted the part of a gentleman toward me."

The young man grasped his hand, and there was a suspicious moistness in the eyes of both men.

An awkward silence of several minutes' duration followed, and then Francis said:

"Well, as I understand it, you have traced the crime to me, and have a warrant for me. Am I right?"

"I am truly sorry to say that you are," rejoined Thad in a broken voice. "I have

done everything in my power to avert this thing. I started out with the intention of tracing it to another party, and went so far as to arrest him, and he now lies in jail; but, in spite of everything, the circumstances point to you more directly than to him."

Francis was silent some time, and then ventured timidly:

"It is probably not my business to ask the question, but I believe it is an important point in the conviction of a man on purely circumstantial evidence to discover a motive. I presume, of course, you have found a motive in my case?"

This was a poser for the detective, but the inquiry was a welcome and gracious one.

In his innermost heart he craved for a single ray of hope for the young man, and it had been reserved for him to offer it.

"No," he answered almost joyfully; "in spite of all the damaging evidence against you, there is an entire absence of the very important element—a motive."

"That is all I wanted to know in that direction," returned Francis. "I was of the opinion that a motive was important, and I wondered what you would be able to find in that line in my case. Now, would you mind telling me what new evidence you have found?"

"Yes. I have found very damaging evidence against you."

"What, for instance?"

"Well, in the first place, I saw a woman in Newtown by the name of Melville. You visited her house on the night of the murder, and your clothing was wet from rain and covered with blood. You gave as a reason for this that your horse had thrown you and jammed your nose, causing it to bleed. Do you recall the incident?"

To Thad's utter astonishment, the young man replied:

"I do not."

"Do you not remember going to her house and asking for supper, and that she washed the blood from your clothes?"

"I have not the slightest recollection of any such thing, sir. If I had, I should certainly tell you. There can be no good in my denying anything."

"You astonish me, sir."

"I cannot help that. What I tell you is perfectly true."

And spite of appearances, the detective could not choose but believe him.

"Well, there may be an extenuation in the fact that you were intoxicated," muttered Thad. "I have known of cases where men under the influence of liquor did things of which they had no recollection afterward. But, here is another thing, and it is the most important bit of evidence I have."

And he produced the umbrella.

At the sight of the umbrella the young man started as though it had been the ghost of his victim.

"Where did you find that?" he gasped.

"Under the rose-bush, by the window of the cottage, where you must have gone to take a look at your victim before entering the house," rejoined Thad coolly.

And he watched to see the effect of his words on Francis.

But to his surprise the only effect it produced was a look of utter mystification.

"Well, this is the most remarkable affair I ever heard of," the accused finally said, half musingly. "As I hope for salvation, I have not the least recollection of any of the occurrences of which you speak, any more than if I had never been within a thousand miles of the place, and yet I am forced by the circumstances to believe with you that I must have done it. There is but one thing which I cannot understand, and that is, why I should have killed that poor old woman who was always kind and gentle to me, and I could not have found any resentment in my heart against her, no matter what she had done."

There was a pathos in these words that sunk deep into the detective's heart, uttered as they were in the young man's usually low, gentle tone, and while a tear stood in his eye.

A feeling of revulsion seized Thad which was too strong for him to resist. Every sentiment of his soul, every fiber of his frame

appeared to rise in rebellion against the condemnation of this innocent young man.

It was in vain that he tried to be stern and practical; the feeling of pity would not down.

And in the midst of the tumult that arose within him, the detective arose to his feet and declared:

"And by the Heaven that bends above us, Francis Jerome, I do not even now, believe you guilty!"

The young man tottered to his feet, the tears streaming from his eyes, and put out his hand.

"God bless you, sir!" he cried in husky tones. "The jury may find me guilty on the evidence you have discovered, but so long as I live, I shall never forget this encouraging sentiment from you!"

And he grasped the detective's hand warmly.

A moment of silence ensued; then each man resumed his seat, and Francis said, almost inaudibly:

"Well, sir, there is no use of deferring matters. I am ready as soon as you are."

Thad started at the sound of the words; already he had begun to dream.

He was again going over the evidence pro and con, and as he did so, three features arose prominently before him.

One of these was the lack of motive on the part of Francis; another was the presence of a motive in the case of Donald, and the third was the key. He could not get over that. How came Donald with that key?

"No," he finally returned, "my friend; I believe I can trust you not to leave the city to-night, and I hope before another sun rises to fix the guilt upon some one else. If I do not succeed I will call upon you to-morrow."

"Stay, I can save you that trouble, and at the same time," he said, lowering his voice and casting his eyes about in a suggestive manner, "and at the same time, save the folks the mortification of seeing me go out of the house in chains. I shall call at your house at precisely ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Very well; that will be better. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir, and God bless you!"

The night was crisp and clear, and the fresh air was soothing to Thad's fevered brow; so, instead of taking a vehicle, he walked for some distance down the avenue.

He had not proceeded far when he became aware that he was again being followed, and it required no great stretch of imagination to guess that it was by the same individual who had followed him before.

Whoever the person was, he kept along the stone wall facing the Park, as before, so that it was impossible to determine to a certainty who or what he was.

Thad determined to give all the opportunities possible to attempt whatever evil purpose he might have in view, and when he had reached the darkest and most lonely part of the road, he crossed over to the Park side. He had no more than done so, when he realized that the shadower was creeping up on him, and the detective affected to be ignorant of the fact.

He walked very slowly, but kept the fellow in view in the peculiar manner he had of looking out of the corner of his eye, and saw that he was getting ready to spring upon him.

Still, Thad made no sign of apprehension, and at last the villain made a spring.

But he had sadly miscalculated upon his victim.

Quicker than the flash of the blade he upheld, Burr's hand swung around and clasped the wrist of the hand which held the murderous steel.

At the same instant Thad's disengaged hand closed with a vise-like grip about the fellow's windpipe.

For a moment the two men glared at each other, and then the detective said:

"Well, my friend, you made a slight mistake that time, didn't you?"

But the question was wasted, for the fellow was unable to answer for the grip on his throat.

"Now, my pretty bird," pursued Thad, "I'm in a little quandary what to do with you, and for that reason will give you your choice, whether I shall kill you on the spot, or take you to jail. Which do you prefer?"

In order that the wretch might answer, he let up on his windpipe a little, and the fellow began to beg:

"Oh, Mr. Burr!" he whined, "if you will let me go, I'll give ye a piece of information that ye'd give a good deal fer."

"What is it?" demanded the detective, sternly.

"I'll tell ye who murdered old Miss James!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

RIGHT AT LAST.

BURR considered the proposition for a moment, and decided to accept a portion of it.

"I'll take you down to my house," he said, "and there you can have an opportunity to confess whatever you have to divulge. If it is satisfactory, I may set you at liberty, but if not, I shall have to lock you up."

The fellow was willing for anything so that the detective would spare his life, and they started on together.

But, as soon as it was possible to procure a conveyance, Thad called a cab, and they were driven to his house.

When they got into the light, Thad saw that his conjectures had been correct, and it was the Tramp Shadower, who had followed him on a former occasion.

"Now, sir," he began, as soon as he had closed the door upon the prisoner and himself, "the first thing I want you to tell is—what you wanted to follow me for?"

"It was all his orders, sir," replied the tramp, meekly.

"Whose?"

"Donaldson's, sir."

"Ah, it was, eh? What did he want you to follow me for?"

"For to do yer, sir."

"To do me? You mean to assassinate me?"

"Dat's it, sir."

"What did he want to kill me for?"

"He said dat it was his only chance. See?"

"What do you mean?"

"W'y he said dat youse hed some papers 'bout him, an' de gal tole him dat youse hed fixed 'em up so dat dey could be brought in court, an' he t'ought dat if he could put youse to sleep, de papers wouldn't be perduced. See?"

"I see, and a very clever piece of business it was, only he chose the wrong man to carry it out. But you were sent on the same errand once before, were you not?"

"Yep."

"Why didn't you carry it out then?"

"I didn't have de nerve, see?"

"Now tell me about the murder of the old woman out at Newtown. Who murdered her?"

"Me an' Donaldson."

"Well, go on and relate the circumstances."

"Wal, yer see Donaldson wanted to put de ole girl outen de way, 'cause she knowed him like er book, an' knowed he wasn't de cove what he claimed to be. Yer see, he wanted to make out dat he was de true kid o' old Jerome, de rich banker, an' dat de cove w'at holds down de sit now was de chicken o' ole Mrs. Donaldson—"

"Who?"

"Ned's mudder, see?"

"Yes, but she is not his mother."

"W'at's de reason she ain't?"

"He is the son of the woman who was murdered."

"Not on yer life! He's ole Miss Donaldson's pup, see? An' de ole girl's inter de scheme furdern a rat kin go in er hole."

"Well, go on."

"Wal, as I was sayin', he wanted ter git erway wid de ole girl out dere, an' he comed ter me fer to help him wid de job. He said he wanted it done so's somebody else'd git de blame, so we talked de racket over, him an' me an' his mudder, an' finely she perposed dat we implicate young Jerome."

"Dat was not so easy, but we finely fixed it this way:

"We knowed de young duck was a little on de booze sometimes, so we watched our chance. One night me an' Smudge—"

"Who is he?" interrupted Thad.

"He's a bloke w'at Ned hired to help me."

"Well?"

"One night me an' Smudge seen de young cove sailin' along purty hilarious, an' we shadderred him till we caught him in er dark place, w'en we pounced on him an' give him de wipe."

"What is that?"

"Er handkercher wid chloroform."

"I see."

"Den, w'en he was asleep we chucked him inter a kerrige and druv him down here. We tole Ned w'at was up, and he was wid us in er minit. We druv de cove out to Newtown, walked him round in de rain till he was purty well soaked, an' den smeared him wid some blood w'at I got out of a cat I killed, and turned him loose to enjoy hisself."

"Did you notice where he went when you let him go?"

"Shure. He went inter a boardin'-house w'ere Ned tole him to go, an' w'ere he knowed dey'd know 'im an' stag his racket. Ned also tole him to say dat he'd been t'rowed offen his horse an' hurted."

"And he was stupid enough to say whatever he was tole, eh?"

"Yep, he was dead stupid. Yer see he revived a little w'en we was goin' out, an' said he was thirsty, an' Ned give him a dose o' knocker-out."

"Had he an umbrella with him?"

"Yep, w'en we flounced him first, and Ned tole us to take dat an' drop it near de house w'ere de murder was to be done."

"Which you did?"

"Shure."

"What time was it when you turned him loose?"

"'Bout eight o'clock in de evenin'."

"And the murder had not yet been committed?"

"Nope."

"You then went and committed the crime, did you?"

"Yep."

"How did you get into the house?"

"Ned hed er key."

"But I found a key in the road after the murder."

"I know. Dat was one w'at we found in de door, and Ned said we'd better drop it so's to t'row de smellers off de track."

"Why did he keep the one he had?"

"He t'ought he might want ter go back again."

"Who was it walked through the garden and stuck his umbrella down into the soft earth?"

"Dat was Ned."

"Did he wear a high hat?"

"Nope."

"How did the ring which looked like the impression of a silk hat come on the marble-topped table?"

"Dat was made wid de top of a hat w'ich I took out fer de purpose. Dat's an ole gag, yer know."

"Did you see Francis Jerome any more after you turned him loose at the boarding-house?"

"Yep; I overtook him as he was makin' fer de depot and slipped a pair o' kids inter his pocket."

"A pair of kids?"

"Yep. Yer see, as we went out I swiped de kids from his pocket, an' w'en I went to do me act—"

"That is, kill the woman?"

"Yep."

"You did the act, then?"

"Yep."

"Well?"

"Wal, w'en I went to do it, I pulled on de kids—dey was lavender—so's not to soil me hands, and de ole girl clawed de backs, so I knowed it'd be in de correct line o' business to put de kids back in de young cove's pocket."

"And after that you burned the papers, eh?"

"Ned done dat."

"After which you left the place?"

"Dat's right."

"That is all. Now, my good fellow, it will be necessary to lock you up, but I will admit this confession as state's evidence, and it will be used in your behalf at the trial."

The fellow demurred strenuously, but Thad took him to the Tombs and turned him over to the sergeant, who locked him up.

When Thad got back home he turned his

attention to the papers he had secured from the cottage.

For the most part they were similar to the others which he had got, legal documents, letters and the like.

But, there was one of peculiar interest.

This was in the form of a confession, made by Marie James, and attested by a notary!

The purport of this important find was as follows:

She had been engaged by Manton Jerome and Laura, his first wife, to exchange the infant son of the banker's second wife for that of Laura's son. This she had agreed to do, but when it came to the performance of the act, her heart had failed her. Besides, she knew that they would never know the difference, so she allowed matters to stand just as they were.

This showed that Francis Jerome was the son of Mr. Jerome's second wife and consequently the legal heir to his property.

The boy Donald was the son of Laura and a second husband named Donaldson, and the first child, the son of Manton Jerome, had died at the age of twelve years.

This instrument she had had drawn up, signed, witnessed and attested by a notary, for the purpose of setting everything right in the event of anything ever coming up which would tend to throw a doubt upon the legitimate rights of Francis Jerome, and in case Laura, or her son by her second husband, should attempt to play the game which they had just been foiled in.

The document was very long and full of technical legal phrases, but the above is the substance of it.

Burr was so enthusiastic over the discovery, which, coupled with the confession he had just heard, seemed to clear up everything, that, late as it was, he could not rest until he had called upon Francis to give him the glorious news.

It was long after midnight when he reached the house, but the young man was still up.

The events of the earlier part of the evening had rendered him too nervous to sleep and he was sitting in his room reading when the detective arrived.

He read his fate in the detective's sunny face, and divined the cause of his visit.

"I'll bet an oyster supper that I can guess the verdict!" he cried with more animation than Thad had ever seen him exhibit.

"Well, what is it?" smiled the detective, taking him by the hand.

"You have good news for me."

"You are right—glorious news," returned Thad.

"For Heaven's sake let me hear it! Don't keep me in suspense."

"Don't be impatient, my boy. Good news will always keep."

"Not too long. I have had good dreams before now, and always awoke before the fulfillment of my hopes. Go on, please."

Burr then proceeded to relate the circumstances of the tramp's attempt upon his life, together with his (the detective's) victory, and the confession which followed their arrival at the house, and wound up by showing him the confession of Mrs. James.

The young man jumped clear off his chair. He danced about like a boy and cried for joy.

"Mr. Burr, you are the greatest man that ever lived!" he declared over and over again. "Whatever I have in this world is yours. You have done what no other man could have done. But for you I would certainly have been hanged for a crime of which I was innocent."

And a thousand other flattering compliments which, although they were extravagant in the extreme, were grateful to the kind-hearted detective who, having accomplished the greatest detective work of his life, could not but feel that he deserved them.

And then, in spite of all his protestations, the young man would insist upon filling out a cheque for a hundred thousand dollars and thrusting it upon the detective.

"This is a mere pittance of what I owe you!" declared Francis with the tears rolling down his cheeks, "but it is an earnest of what I would like to do, and I will add to it, with your permission, my life-long gratitude and friendship."

"Which is worth more in my estimation,

said Thad in a husky voice, "than your money. I shall feel very proud of your friendship."

"This will be glorious news for my father, who will arrive from Europe in the morning."

"I shall be glad to make his acquaintance."

"You shall. I shall bring him down the moment he arrives."

And Thad left the house a very happy man, because he had rendered a fellow mortal happy, and brought to justice one of the most thoroughly depraved villains he had ever encountered.

Early the following morning he received a call from Ida.

She was as chipper as ever, and no one would have imagined that she had ever had a moment's worry in all her giddy life.

"Well," she said, dropping into a chair beside him, "I'll bet the game has come out as I planned it."

"You're wrong this time, my girl," he returned. "It has come out just the opposite."

"I'll bet you."

"Very well, what was your plan?"

"That you should go out and discover the clues which appeared to convict Francis Jerome. I knew that was the only thing that would lead you to investigate and get at the bottom of the facts. Well, you saw the old woman and got her statement, and found the umbrella where Ned dropped it. After that you got the papers which showed that Ned was just what I said he was, the son of Mrs. Donaldson and not the son of old Mr. Jerome. Now, all you've got to do is to arrest that coward, Dolph, and he'll give the whole plot away."

"You're right in everything except one, my dear," smiled Thad.

"What is that?"

"Dolph, the Tramp Shadower, has already aired his conscience and is now in jail."

"Good!" cried the girl enthusiastically.

"But, you're not done yet."

"How's that?"

"There is one more to cage yet, and that is the ringleader of the whole business."

"Who may that be?"

"Old Mrs. Donaldson."

"Was she the instigator of the plot?"

"She originated and planned everything."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Read this letter."

And she handed him a letter in the old woman's handwriting, which he recognized at a glance.

It was written to the girl herself, and was a full outline of the plot which had been attempted, and would have been carried out only for the work of the great detective.

"Now what do you think?" she inquired with an arch smile.

"I think that you are a trump, and you shall profit by this. But, how is it you did not go into the plot?"

She looked at him with a hurt expression. He saw his mistake, and hastened to apologize.

"I ask your pardon," he said, kindly. "I should have known better than to have asked such a question."

"Yes," she said meekly. "I may be a demon, as Ned called me, but I would like some people to believe me a White Demon."

THE END.

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